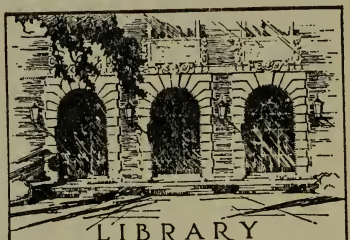

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CASTLE AVON.

VOL. I.

CASTLE AVON.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"EMILIA WYNDHAM," "RAVENSCLIFFE,"

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CASTLE AVON.

CHAPTER I.

"A voice was heard in Ramah, Rachel mourning for her children, and would not be comforted because they were not."

Oh, what a fearful night it is! How the wind roars and howls round the house, and what torrents of rain pour down between the blasts! Surely a water-spout must have burst among the hills. The rain falls in flakes, in flashes, in streams of water, rather than descends in drops.

Sometimes she leaves that bedside by which she is sitting, her hand clasped in his, and hastens to a room of which the window over-

looks the front door. She opens the casement, and thrusts her head out, regardless of the driving storm, and vainly striving to pierce the thick darkness of that pitiless night. Vainly, indeed! — a pitchy darkness is round her; she cannot even trace the faintest image of the neighbouring woods; she cannot see the trees close to the house; she cannot even see her hand.

The tempest howls furiously; the casement shakes in her fingers, she with difficulty draws it in. She fastens it, turns yet one glance upon the impenetrable darkness without — one straining, anxious, almost despairing glance, and then returns to watch by the bedside.

The sufferer raises his heavy eyelids as she enters, and one fitful gleam of intelligence is cast upon her from eyes which never met hers but in love; then he murmurs a few words, which she bends her head down with anxious, hungry impatience to understand.

"Is he come?" the sufferer faintly articulates.

"Not yet, not yet; but I expect him every moment."

"A long, weary night. Oh, when will it be morning?"

And the heavy eye-lids closed again. And then another blast rushed by, wilder and louder than ever, and the rain poured against the windows.

And it seemed as if a shrieking might be heard, as of spirits passing over the roof of the many-gabled wilderness of a house, and the wind roared among the old chimneys, and shook at the casements, as if clamouring to come in. The sinking spirits of the dying man, though he was too far gone to listen to the tempest, were evidently shaken and exhausted by this tumult of external nature, and the flame of life just flashing, as in a sinking candle, wasted all the faster because of this.

And the breath came with more difficulty, and the dark shadows began to deepen over his face, and he seemed to sink into a state half slumber, half death, and still she sat by his side.

Sometimes she cast those eyes, so full of passionate love, upwards, imploring the mercy from above to abate this pitiless storm without, to assuage the cruel anguish within. But she prayed without hope, for he she loved was

rapidly departing; and still the storm without raged on, and her other treasure—the treasure also so passionately, so desperately loved—where was he?

In that storm? Among those wild woods, or traversing those desolate moors? And in such a night as this?

Then she stole out of the chamber of death again, and went and stood at the top of the stairs, and looked down into the hall, now dimly lighted by a half-expiring lamp.

There was a dark figure standing by one of the pillars below. She spoke in a low, trembling voice, and asked:

"Who is that?"

"Only me, Madam."

"What are you doing there?"

"Only listening and watching."

She came half-way down the stairs to speak to him over the banisters.

"Willmore," in a low, trembling whisper.

"Yes, Madam."

"You are sure Mr. Yates is not come back? He might have come in the stable-way."

"Oh no, Madam, he is not come back."

"How did he go? On horseback?"

"Yes, Madam. The roads are so bad, he said he could bring the child more safely upon a cushion before him than in any other way."

"What horse did he take?"

"Old Black Bess."

"She is very quiet?"

"As a lamb, Madam."

"But in such a night as this! Surely he would take a chaise."

"No doubt he would do so, Madam; but the road for carriages is a very long way round, and even that, at best, but a narrow lane, full of ruts."

"A chaise would, of necessity, be a long time coming?"

"At any time; and on a night like—"

And as he spoke such a hurricane beat against the great heavy hall door, that it seemed as if it would burst it open. Every window rattled violently, the house itself seemed to rock to its foundation, and rain in deluges poured down upon the skylight.

"I almost think," said Willmore, "Mr. Yates would hardly venture out at all with the child in such weather as this. He must have determined to stay till morning."

"God grant it may be as you say."

And swiftly she re-ascended the stairs and stole into her husband's room, and sat down by his bedside and slid her hand into his. He still slumbered.

And so she sat, and hour and hour rolled by, told off by the sullen clang of the large stable clock. Gradually, however, the violence of the storm seemed to abate, and as the chill hours before dawn drew onwards, the deluge of rain was assuaged and the windows of heaven appeared to be closing again, and the water-drops fell in a sort of measured cadence, and the wind mourned rather than raged. Still the sufferer slumbered, and she, as she held his hand, sank insensibly into a dose and slumbered too; and the lamp threw a flickering ray upon the chamber, its wide extent and gloomy magnificence in part dimly seen through that gray twilight, in part lost in impenetrable shadow. But the light fell full upon the bed with its heavy dark green velvet curtains and its covering of quilted satin, in which lay one whom not all his wealth and splendour, not all his goodness and usefulness, not all the passionate devotion of a young and yearning heart, could redeem from an early

grave. For He had summoned him, whose sentence is without appeal. The span of life was at an end, the thread of life was spun out, and he must go.

In the sure and certain hope of a blessed futurity ?

Yes. Through God's infinite mercies, in the sure and certain hope.

And though she, that young and fair, and idolizing and idolized one, on whom his heart doated, must be left behind. Yet in that sure and certain hope they both prepared to part, and bowed the head and accepted the cross in patience, and in faith in the restitution of all things.

They should meet again ! Yes, they should meet again !

The flame of the lamp casts its long dim ray upon that angel face and figure, covered with her white dressing-gown, and her beautiful golden hair gathered up under her close nursing-cap, her long throat, bending like a lily, bowed down, for her head has sunk and rests against a pillow lying on one side of the bed, where she still holds his hand.

He had prepared himself to go, so soon as

his doom had been pronounced by the medical attendant, and he had only requested that the few hours which remained to him in this world might be passed with his wife in quiet and peace, without the hurry of attendance or the bustle of now useless endeavour.

They had taken leave of each other, as hearts that truly love do. For the infinite of love is a revelation in itself. Those who love most, believe most. Such feelings as theirs are made for eternity, and reveal eternity. But one fond feeling still remained unsatisfied, one tender tie still drew him back to earth.

His little child. He must see his little child again before he died. The boy was at his grandmother's, some twenty miles distance, and a track of desolate mountain, moor and woodland lay between the two houses. Twenty miles it was, right across the country; but by the carriage road, or rather through the deep lanes by which carriages might possibly make their way, nearly twenty miles more.

During the agonising paroxysms of extreme suffering on the one side and the almost equally agonising alternations of hope and fear upon the other, neither parent had seemed to miss or to

wish for the child; but when the fatal sentence was pronounced, and the calm of a terrible certainty succeeded to the agitations of suspense, the father asked to embrace his baby-boy before he died; and the poor mother's heart yearned with an intensity indescribable to see her infant once more, though for the last time, in his father's arms, and to hear him bless him before he died.

All—all he could do for this son of his love now. But oh, that blessing! Let him but have his father's dying blessing! was her heart's prayer.

Immediately upon this Mr. Yates had started, and owing to the state of the roads and the circumstances above mentioned, had decided upon crossing the country, mounted on a large powerful black horse, whose gentleness and steadiness were only equalled by his mighty strength, and upon bringing home the little boy placed upon a cushion before him—a manner of carrying young children at that time not uncommon, when the state of the cross-roads was often such, as to make travelling in carriages very slow and inconvenient, not to say dangerous work.

The steward—for Mr. Yates was the steward,

head and confidential man in this large establishment—had set forwards about twelve o'clock that morning; he calculated upon arriving at the Grange in about two hours and a half, resting there a couple of hours, and being back at Glistonbury between seven and eight o'clock in the evening.

The equinox was already past; yet still between seven and eight, though that night there happened to be no moon, sufficient light, he hoped, would remain to enable him to find his way easily through the moors home, to say nothing of the instincts of Black Bess, who was well acquainted with every foot of the way.

But seven and eight, and nine and ten, and midnight had passed, and no Mr. Yates had appeared; until at last the wearied household, concluding that the desperate state of the weather had prevented him setting out, or that he had taken a chaise, stole one after another to bed, leaving nobody up in that large household but Mr. Willmore and the housekeeper, and one or two of the older women-servants, whose sorrow and anxiety for their master and mistress made it impossible for them to rest. The old coachman and two or three of the grooms also

sat dozing in the servants' hall, whose windows looked towards the stable-yard, imagining that at any hour Mr. Yates might arrive.

So all was very still in that mansion of death, over which a feeling of solemn awfulness hung, and a heaviness crept over one and over another as it had done over the gentle and loving wife and mother herself.

It was so quiet, you might distinctly hear the death-watch ticking behind the case of the great kitchen clock, which was now down, lest its striking should disturb the master; and the snoring of the old bloodhound, which had been the old Lord's, and now lay stretched upon the kitchen hearth. For the raging tempest had begun to subside, and the winds to sing a mournful lullaby and requiem over the good man who was about to depart—the man whom all loved and honoured much, and deeply. Nature, at last, seemed to yield to the all-pervading melancholy, and to mourn,

"As things inanimate will mourn,"

over the unreturning grave, alas!

And so he slumbers: and she, her hand in his, dozes; and now opens her eyes, and gazes

at him; and now the heavy lids close again—for her heart is overladen with grief, and her eyes with watching, and the profound quiet sheds its influence upon her.

And in her doze, she sees that lovely, loving child, with his golden curling locks, and his large eyes of blue—so full of the mysterious depths of infant love and passion, and his cherub arms are round his father's neck; and that extenuated, but still most beautiful hand, is upon the child's head, and those eyes—those eyes into which she was wont to look, with something of the adoration of a poor Pagan when looking at his god—those eyes are raised up in prayer, and he is blessing his boy—their boy—the bond which bound them, if possible, still closer and closer together.

Oh! sweet dream!

She awakes suddenly from it. She springs up and listens. A cry!—yes! she heard a cry, surely. Again—again! What is it?—what is it?

CHAPTER II.

The cry sounded as if it made a part of the dreams of an uneasy slumber, yet it started her awake; and as she still listened, confused and scarcely herself, it was repeated. Then there was a sort of subdued noise and hurry to be heard, upon that side of the house which was occupied by the servants, and with which the passage, into which her bed-room opened, communicated by a back staircase. There was, also, a large window at the end of this passage, which looked into the stable-yard.

As she listened, her ear rendered preternaturally acute by her state of nervous agita-

tion, she thought she caught the sound of horses' hoofs in the yard.

A moment she stood still, with lifted ear, listening breathless, as if life depended on the sound; then she cast one fond look upon the bed where the dying man lay, and quick as lightning darted from his side, and flew down the staircase, and along the passage which led to the stable-yard door.

It was open, and the servants were gathered outside it; and strange noises, as of men in distress and perplexity, proceeded from without. Such were not the delighted greetings that ought to have welcomed her boy! Her heart began to quiver and tremble, to fail and sink again; but she was rushing forward, when, just before she reached the open door, she was met and her dress caught by Willmore.

"Come! come! He is come!—I heard the horse's feet. Where is he?—where is he? My child—my treasure!"

No answer; but an endeavour upon the part of the faithful old servant, gently to push her back.

"What—why—what is the matter, Willmore?"

The old man's face was pale as ashes.

"My boy!—my boy!"

She looked in his face, then desperately tore away from him, dashed forward, and wildly rushed into the stable-yard.

There it stood; yes, there stood the horse—the good black steed; but covered with mire, bathed in moisture, scared, panting and alone! A groom held his head. But Mr. Yates and the child, where were they?

"What—what! what is this? My boy! Mr. Yates! What is this? The horse!—What is this?"

"The horse came home alone; he rushed into the stable-yard full gallop, as if he was mad; all drowned over, as one may say, with water and mud; his eye wild, and his nostril distended, as if he had been scared out of his wits. And, oh! the ford—the ford!" cried the groom, as he finished his relation.

"The ford!—the ford!" was taken up by the voices around; "swelled by the rains—swelled by the rains!"

"Do you mean to say the horse has come home alone, and that the steward and the boy

are drowned!" she screamed, rather than cried. "Oh! my God!—my God! the ford—the ford!" and she darted forwards, as if she would rush out of the stable-yard, and seek the lost herself.

Oh! how the wind came howling from that wilderness, and as if the cries of drowning wretches were mingling in the blast! But old Willmore hurried after his lady, and once more caught her by the gown.

"Madam—my lady—mistress! my master—my dying master!"

"Oh, yes! he is dying!—I know he is dying! But what will he do for his boy? Let me go!—let me go!" she cried, passionately, again endeavouring to rend her garments from his hands; "they are struggling in the waters! Run! run all of us—all of you! We may yet save them!"

"Alas! my lady—mistress, dear mistress! be patient. Think of God, dear mistress, and be patient. Oh dear—oh dear! The ford is six miles off!" cried the old man, bursting into tears.

"Six miles off! Do you say six miles off? Well, well, let us run right across the moor:

what is six miles? My God! will you none of you move an inch to save them!"

"They are gone already, mistress—Madam. John Gardner, and the coachman, and Will, started off as soon as Black Bess drove like a mad thing into the yard. They thought there must be a mischief: they are gone to see. Dear, dear mistress, what could you do? And my poor master dying all alone!" said the old man, sobbing aloud.

"Ah well—ah well!" she answered, looking round composedly, and as if her wits were beginning to leave her. "One dying, and the other drowned! You told me to call upon God, didn't you, old man?—'Out of the depths'—ay, that is it. Take me back to my husband's death-bed, Willmore! for my knees are knocking together, and I think I can't stand. Take me back to my husband, my lover, my only—only friend, to his death-bed. He'll soon be lost and gone, too! Take me back, Willmore!"

The old man obeyed, assisted by the housekeeper. They lifted, rather than led her back to her husband's bedside. She sank down again into the chair she had quitted. She

neither sighed, nor shed a tear; her heart felt as a stone within her; her glazed eyes turned wistfully to her husband. He lay there, still in a sort of quiet, unbroken doze; his breathings low and regular, except for a few pauses; one fair hand stretched out upon the bed. Gradually she slipped down upon her knees, took it in both hers, and laid her cheek against it.

It was very cold: no pressure answered to hers. The soul had already retreated to its last citadel, before taking its last flight!

Suddenly, as the flame of a candle before it expires leaps up in the socket, a glow seemed to revisit the frame. The eyes of the expiring man suddenly opened:

"The child," he uttered distinctly; "the child, love!—love, the child!" and he expired.

She could not and would not believe for some time that he was really gone; that the dark, mysterious curtain which severs the living and the dead had fallen; and that the one so loved, so clung to, the great reality of her existence, was dissolved. That, become an object of

faith, an existence to her spirit alone, which had been the most beloved of all actual existences.

She was stunned, confused as a stone; the idea was too overwhelming, too stupendous, too unintelligible for conception. She stood and gazed—and gazed—and gazed. She did not know where she was: all material things seemed reeling round her. It was no longer a substantial world in which she stood; everything was a dream now, for he was become a dream.

The poor servants, who had now crowded into the room—for all ceremony and distinction of rank had vanished before the awful realities of that night—her poor servants knew not what to do for her. Poor things, they were bewildered themselves, with grief and horror, and this dumb, tearless sorrow, terrified and perplexed them. They expected wailings and tears, and hysterical cries; but this terrible silence was the more terrible, because they could not understand it. They looked one at another, uncertain what to do.

Willmore was quite at a stand. The housekeeper, good woman, who had known the loss

of child and husband herself, comprehended a trifle better. She felt that out of this stupor the poor young creature must be roused, or that she would lose her senses. To do this she could imagine nothing better, than gently to lay her hand upon the lifeless body, as if with intent to move it. The poor young thing started at this, and stretched hastily forward, as if to prevent an impious hand from touching a sacred relic.

"How dare you?" she cried.

The spell was dissolved—she had spoken.

Willmore now ventured to come up to her, and with his kind, respectful, old servant's voice and manner, say: "Dear missis, you must come out of this; you must indeed."

"Must I?—must I? Yes, yes: it is all over now," and bursting into a flood of tears, she wailed, and cried aloud, as the old man gently led her away.

This kindly relief of nature lasted but till she entered the passage, and cast her eyes upon the window which looked towards the stables; then she suddenly begun shuddering and shaking. Then as suddenly she cried out: "I remember, I remember; there is nothing to keep me here now. Get out the cart as fast as you can, *that*

can go over the moors any way, and let me be off to the ford; let us follow the track—track the horse's feet, Willmore, as the wild Indians do; follow the trail—follow the trail; we shall find them yet—we shall find them yet."

Her speech was hurried and incoherent, but the old man was glad to find that the matter of it was sound.

"Yes, Madam," he said, "I will have the cart out instantly, and drive you myself the way to the ford. The track is easy enough to find; it lies right across the hills. Black Bess would be sure to take that one, as, poor beast, she could not have found a nigher. There, Mrs. Fulmer, get your mistress's cloak and bonnet, and fetch her a cup of warm milk and water too," he whispered; "she'll drink that. Don't try for anything more yet awhile."

He was glad to get his poor lady out upon the moors; though the wind whistled mournfully, and it was dismally cold; and the rain, though it had abated, still from time to time came gushing down in sudden showers.

So she suffered them to put on her cloak and bonnet, and placed herself hastily in the spring cart; for, as her recollection gradually

returned, her whole soul was agonizing to be at the ford, with that natural impatience to see and act herself, which possesses every one upon such occasions.

And so they set out for the moors. And now, the dawn began to break, and a silver line of light to show itself behind the desolate hills, from beneath a heavy, lifted cloud.

They followed a broken, irregular track over the waste, interrupted every here and there by pools of water left by the last night's rain, and by black miry bogs, through which the way was difficult and dangerous; and she, who kept her head over the side of the cart, and her eyes bent upon the road, could, though often intercepted, still follow the track which the horse, in his wild paroxysm of terror, had left through the black mire and clay. The deep indentations of his hoofs were plainly to be seen, but nothing else—no trace of anything else; not the shred of a garment; not a vestige; not a footstep!

And so, over these dismal hills, and through the deep valleys, mostly clothed on each side with a rough, brambly, almost impervious brushwood that intersected them, they arrived

at last where a mountain stream came rushing impetuously across the road, which was usually a brawling, and not very wide torrent, but now swelled by the night's rain to a deep, overwhelming river. Not only the usual bed of the stream was filled, but the banks high upwards were covered by the deluge of water which still came sweeping down.

The track ended; they had arrived at the ford. There, upon the steep side of the bank, where the road terminated, the ground was all torn up, as by the hoofs of a horse struggling upwards. The miry clay was trampled over; and here, at last, the marks of human footsteps were discernible. Of different sizes and shapes, however, and but little could be made out of them, for the earth was nearly reduced to one puddle. The road lay here in a hollow way, between high banks entirely grown over with broom, gorse and brushwood, and carpeted beneath with moss and bilberries; and the narrow track between appeared recently to have been trampled over by numbers. The deep print of the horse's hoofs were, however, yet discernible, amid the indistinct and confused footsteps of men.

There the cart stopped, and the young mother sprang to the ground. And first, almost on hands and knees, she examined the track, striving to discover the footsteps of a child amid the confusion of horses' feet which had trampled over the place. But no—no such footstep was there, not one, hunt as she might. Footsteps of men, and it might be of women—but not one of a child.

"I see no child's footsteps," she said at last, sadly, to her companion.

"Dear me, no, Madam. They would never have reached the bank through that deluge of water."

"Black Bess can swim. Black Bess *did* reach the bank. Mr. Yates was a bold and brave rider—ay, and a splendid swimmer, too. I am certain they were not drowned."

And as the mother, in the faith and divination of affection, pronounced these words in a raised tone, a sort of indistinct, odd sound was heard close by, seeming to issue from an almost impervious thicket which hung over the road.

"What was that? Did you hear anything?" she said to Willmore, turning suddenly towards the place whence the sound had proceeded.

And as she did so, she fancied she saw the tangled branches moving, as if some living being was concealed within.

"There is somebody there. I heard a low laugh. I saw the branches move—I am sure I did."

"Alas! Madam, the wind sings and wails wildly among the trees and hills, and blows the branches up and down. There is nothing there."

The men that had been sent out a few hours before had some time ago left this place, and had gone on, skirting the banks of the river, in hopes of discovering some vestiges of the lost ones. They were now heard returning; and the lady and her servant, uncertain what to do next, awaited their approach. They came up; they had something in their hands.

"What is that?" she called out.

"Poor Mr. Yates's hat. It has his mark in it."

"Where did you find it?"

"Low down the river. It seemed to have floated that way. It had been stopped by a bough which had fallen across the water, and so we were able to reach it. Poor man!"

"And nothing more?" she cried with feverish impatience, "nothing more?"

"Yes, Madam," said one of them, in a hesitating manner, it was the gardener, "a little child's glove, close by the water just below where my lady stands."

"Wet or dry?"

"Dry."

"My child is *not* drowned, then!" she almost shrieked. "I was certain of it."

But, oh! it rained and rained. The heavens were pitiless, or perhaps they poured down their torrents in sympathy with her who shed no tear. She passed that long and dreadful day, searching and searching, over and over again, the same spot.

But what could it avail? No vestige of child or man, except the little child's glove, which was found unwetted upon the bank, and the hat which had been swept forwards by the waters.

"The glove was dry," she kept repeating: "the child could not have been drowned, for the glove was dry."

"Ay, but," said Willmore, who, convinced

that both Mr. Yates and the child had perished, thought it best for his lady that she should acquiesce in a belief which with him amounted to a certainty, "are you certain, gardener, that the glove *was* dry when you found it? You put it in your warm pocket directly, didn't you?"

"To my belief," persisted the gardener, "it was as dry as a bone, when Will picked it up."

"Not so," interrupted Will, "not *quite* dry, as I remember; wetted with the rain mayhap, but not *quite* dry."

"You see, Madam, the glove was *not* dry, after all," said Willmore to his lady.

"Perhaps not," said she, "might have been wetted with the rain. But this glove," she added, gazing with a look indescribable at the tiny, innocent fingers, "has never been plunged in the water, I am certain."

"But, Will," persisted Willmore, well-intentioned, but ill-advised, "you say it was wet when you found it."

"I say it was *almost* if not altogether *dry*," repeated the gardener.

"And I am ready to swear it was as wet as muck," cried Will, in the spirit of contradiction.

"You see, Madam," said Willmore, respectfully but promptly.

"Why will you all conspire to persuade me he is drowned?" she cried out, and flung from them in a passion of tears.

They persisted in the search some time longer, but nothing more could be discovered. Meanwhile the rain kept falling unceasingly, and as it fell, gradually obliterating the traces of the footsteps by the side of the river. Indeed it was now evident that before the arrival of the lady and Willmore, those dispatched in advance had so trampled over the spot, that no inference could be drawn from any vestiges there to be found. Still the rain kept falling, till the poor young lady was wetted entirely through; but she felt not the chill, she was insensible to anything but the all-absorbing object, and long was it before she could be persuaded to abandon the hopeless search for some footsteps of her child.

She would fain have penetrated the briery thicket which overhung each side of the hollow

way, regardless of the dripping branches that poured their cold showers upon her head; but the bushes seemed impervious, and so they literally were, except to some well acquainted with certain little openings and narrow winding paths, which ran through them. Sometimes she clambered upon the rocky and moss-grown banks, which the mountain deluge had invaded, looking wistfully over the waste of waters, rendered still more dreary by the lowering aspect of the sky. Then she would come back to the ford, and again repeat her examination of the ground. Vainly, indeed, not a trace of the infant was to be discovered.

When we have lost some precious thing, how do we search and search again the same spot, vainly hoping to find that which we have already ascertained cannot possibly be there. The little glove meantime was laid in her bosom, and seemed to warm her poor heart. It was to her as an assurance that her child still lived—an assurance in which no other one shared.

Hour followed hour, faint, and wet, and starved; still she could not be persuaded to leave the spot. At last poor old Willmore, quite pale

and exhausted himself, and his face blue with cold and fatigue, succeeded in inducing her to re-enter the cart, and to return home.

He said that when the rain ceased, which it evidently would soon do, for the clouds began to gather up, and a faint, cold, yellow light was dimly appearing in the west—that when the rained ceased, the torrent would soon run itself down; that a man could be left to watch; and that when the water was low enough his lady could return and track the course of the subsiding water, and no doubt some other indications of the sad story would appear.

So she suffered herself to be persuaded, and got into the cart, and turned her face away from the fatal spot. It was not till she did so that she seemed fully to realise her woe. Hope, almost amounting to certainty, had kept up her spirits whilst searching; but now the search was over, and nothing found but the little glove. And she felt that he was drowned, that her darling was lying cold in the bosom of those deep waters, and that she was a childless widow upon the face of the earth.

She became very faint now, for the spirit which had supported her was extinct at last,

and she sank to the bottom of the cart and lay there, feeling no longer able to sit up; and so she remained, her head resting upon a cushion, which Willmore had put under it; and, covered with a horse-cloth which happened to be there, and the cart jolting her over the rough stones; she, so delicate, and of a frame so susceptible, and her clothes all saturated with water, clinging to, and chilling the very marrow of her bones; but none of all this extremely suffering seemed to reach her, for her soul was absorbed in her misery. In utter darkness she lay—all around was dark, nothing but utter darkness. No ray of light, no hope, no life. She could not, out of the depths of her despair, lift up her eyes to Him who never faileth; she was too entirely exhausted to do this. Oh, pray that your faith fail not! ye that lie in the temptation of deep distress, pray that your faith fail not!

In this manner they at last reached the mansion, and the cart stopped. Then she lifted up her head, and said, looking round in a bewildered manner:

"Are we come home?"

"Yes, Madam," said Willmore, and seeing

she did not move, for by this time she was quite stiff with cold, he tried to lift her out of the cart, but he was too weak himself; so he called for help, and the lady's-maid and the housekeeper, and a footman or two, all helping, they lifted her into the house.

Oh! as she entered that hall again, entered it for the first time, so silent and desolate, because they were all dead, how heavily sunk her heart; but she did not weep, her grief was too big for tears.

As they carried her through that noble hall, she cast up one glance at its fretted roof, all inlaid with azure and gold, and then she closed her eyes, and they thought she had fainted. Not altogether that, however, but she was all but insensible; yet her mind, poor thing, could not fall asleep.

"Carry her up, and put her in a warm bed," old Willmore next said, "for she is almost clammed altogether with wet and cold."

So they took her up, and took off her dripping garments, and laid her in her bed all —all alone—alone—alone for ever!

She was passive; she let them do as they would. The oppression of her great grief

seemed to weigh her down and render her motionless, as one under the oppression of some mighty burden. In this state she lay a short time, and then the reaction began, and fever set in, and in the course of a few hours her life was declared to be in danger by the medical men, who stood anxiously watching at her bedside.

Two days and two nights were spent in a low dreamy delirium; the third she awoke again to consciousness, but she was so feeble that she could with difficulty speak so as to be heard. As soon as she was restored, even thus imperfectly to herself, she begged to see Willmore.

The grey-haired old man was soon at her bedside. His old cheeks were flushed, and his eyes red with weeping, and it was with difficulty he could restrain himself from weeping aloud now when he came into his poor lady's room.

She stretched out her pale thin hand, for the eight-and-forty hours of fever had wasted her very much; and in a voice scarcely audible, so

low and faint it was, asked him what had been done whilst she lay deprived of her senses.

"Everything that was necessary," he said, "had been ordered, and for the rest it only waited her directions. Everything so far, had been thus arranged as things were ordered at the funeral of his old master, the late lord, the father of him that was just gone. He supposed his lady would wish to have it so. But for the external ceremonials, he waited till she could give her own orders."

"Let it all be as it was before," she said, almost with indifference—her heart was too much absorbed by her living grief, to cast much thought upon the vain consolation of funeral ceremony; "all as it was before—omit nothing. Take care all is done with the utmost respect. But it was of other things I wanted to speak to you. What news—what news?"

"Nothing to be properly called news, Madam. But—"

"The river must have returned to its bed," said she.

"It has, Madam. No more rain has fallen."

"And has nobody—" making as if she would start up herself; but she was almost

too feeble to lift her hand, she sank back again, and groaned.

"We have searched the bed of the river on both sides."

"And found nothing?"

"Yes, Madam. But—"

"What have you found? Speak out!—don't be afraid. Speak out!—don't be afraid."

But she pressed her two thin hands against her heart, as she said so; for she believed something was going to be said that would kill her.

"Had my mistress not better wait a few days, before she hears any more of this dismal story?" said the old man.

"No!" she cried, with a strange violence; "tell me at once! They have found the child's dead body!" And then she began in a sort of wailing chant to cry and sing: "Oh! bring it to me—bring my cold, dead darling to me, and let me lay him in my bosom. My dear—dear little boy! Ah! it is so cold, it will not warm him!"

"You mistake me, Madam — mistress. Alas! alas! we have not found the body!"

"You *have* not!" And a bright ray of joy shot from her eyes. "You *have* not!

Did I not tell you I was certain my baby was not drowned? Where is the glove?—the glove! Who took away the glove?"

They held it before her; she snatched at it; spread out once more the tiny fingers, and displayed the little palm with a sort of wild triumph.

"His glove has never been in the water!" she cried; "it has *not* been in the water! A few drops of rain may have wetted it; but it has not been *dipped* in water. I am certain the child is not drowned."

"Alas! Madam, and his little hat and feather—"

"His little hat and feather! And what of his little hat and feather?"

"That, Madam, has been found in the river's bed."

"Found his little hat and feather! Oh! bring it! Give it—give it to me!"

It was brought to her all shapeless, and spoiled by the effect of the water, in which it had been so long lying. The white ribbons were all stained and discoloured with mire, and the poor little feather was hanging, broken and uncurled, over the brim.

She caught it greedily in her arms, and pressed it to her bosom, and seemed as if she would devour it with kisses. It was like the living image of her child. She kept kissing it passionately. But she drew not the same conclusion from the finding of the little hat, which the others did. For presently she lifted up her eyes, and said to Willmore:

"The hat is all spoiled by the wet; but the glove was *dry!*" And then she laid both hat and glove in her bosom; and as if the very touch of them soothed and comforted her, she fell asleep.

CHAPTER III.

The Very Reverend the Dean of M—— was a portly man, such as a Dean is wont to be; and, in much state and importance, he resided in the cathedral town of M——, and watched over the magnificent minster, and took very much pains as respected the voices of his choristers, and kept an excellent table, and a very handsome carriage, and performed all the duties of his station most exemplarily—that is to say, in the way those duties were performed some years ago, before a new view of the obligations belonging to their vocation had broken upon churchmen, and that very great change for the better had begun, which

has made, and is still making, such rapid progress in this our day.

Dean Villars was, at the moment when I am about to introduce you to him, seated at the bottom of a table covered with the choicest delicacies, all cooked to perfection; for he was a man of refined taste in every matter which he thought worthy of his attention, from Gothic architecture, down to soufflé puddings; and was indeed generally acknowledged, by all his acquaintance, as the arbiter from whom, in all and every one of such things, there was no appeal.

The Dean loved good eating: it may be, a little for its own sake, but far more he loved it for its accompanying glory; for great was the glory, as he considered these things, of eating well. It was something to be a Dean, and to have charge of one of the noblest cathedrals in the kingdom; it was something to have a choir second to none except the one in His Majesty's Chapel at Windsor; but it was almost more, in his eyes, to have the reputation of keeping the best table known.

It must be owned, there is taste to be dis-

played in the setting forth of a table, and the array of a dining-room, as well as about other things. And what with the massive plate, and what with the sparkling crystal, and what with the fine Oriental china, of the plates and dishes, and what with the real beauty of colouring displayed in the arrangement of the viands, a more agreeable picture than one of the Dean's dinners could not be well presented. And Bassano, who evidently recollected this when painting his "Marriage of Cana," would have delighted in it. He would also have found little cause to quarrel with the figure of the Dean, now seated at the foot of this table; as little with that of his lady, a handsomely dressed gentlewoman, at the head.

The Lady Marion—Westmore having been her maiden name—daughter of the Earl of Carpentas, having fallen in love, some years gone by, with the Dean's good looks when he was only a poor curate, had been allowed to bestow her hand upon him when he had been presented to two rich livings, and had added to them the title of Mr. Dean. Waiting for which, many years had elapsed, and the bloom

upon the lady's cheek had somewhat faded; her fine eyes had assumed a somewhat anxious expression; and her figure, once symmetry itself, had become rather more thin and delicate than was quite consistent with beauty.

The Dean and his lady had now been married several years, and after a long space of time, one little daughter had blest their union. She was at this time about two years of age.

There was a small, select party this day dining with the Dean. Among them might be seen one or two professional singers; for the Dean was a great lover of music, and sometimes took a part in a glee himself; and, be it observed, *en passant*, when he did so, the fine bass tones of his sonorous voice added greatly, in the opinion of all good people, and more especially of such as had just dined at his table, to the beauty of the execution.

There were present also, besides the professional gentlemen above alluded to, some of the principal residents of the cathedral town, or

belonging to the families in the neighbourhood, and one or two beneficed clergymen of the place.

One of these last I am going to introduce you to; and I am sorry to say he is also one of the old, old school—that school which is, as I said above, fast dying out from among us, being succeeded by that earnest, fervent spirit which is the life and ornament of religion in this our happier day.

This gentleman was not, however, like Mr. Dean, a pluralist. Not that he would have been unwilling to be that, or any other *list* which would have put crowns into his purse; for his whole soul was given up to covetousness and base self-interest; vices which, in his profession, once indulged—and there is plenty of time and leisure, if men so choose it, to indulge them—vices which cut into, canker and corrupt, the very core of the heart, and render a man's spiritual office nothing but a hideous mockery.

This gentleman was as unamiable in his external appearance, as one so corrupted at heart should rightly be. He was a dark, beetle-

browed, tall, raw-boned sort of man, with a harsh voice and a harsh eye. Seldom he went among his poor. Parish visitations amid the filthy and unsightly houses which constituted the majority in that portion of the town where his cure lay, were too disagreeable to be thought of. Besides, as he often said, he really wanted time. He kept a curate to do all that sort of thing. Yes, and he allowed him fifty pounds a year, and a very handsome salary too; one had been ready to come for forty, but the fellow was an ass, and besides stuttered so horribly, that he did not think his bishop would like it. So he gave fifty pounds to Mr. Lovel, a very accomplished young fellow, forced to quit the army on account of his health, and then nearly reading himself into a decline at Cambridge; but poor fellow, success there, was his only chance in life, for he had neither fortune nor connection that he knew of, and so he had given him the curacy. And so in truth he had, and without the slightest regard as to the other's fitness for the task. But who that had seen his too bright eye, or the colour that tinted his cheek, or had heard his hollow cough, but would have deemed

him as unfit as the Rector himself, to pass his days visiting among the miserable wretches that crowded the streets near the wharfs. But Mr. Lovel was a true servant of his Master, and not only did he perform his own share of the duty well, but he contrived to fulfil most of that which the other left undone.

But of this curate, and of the parish under his care, more by-and-by.

The parish, indeed, lay at the extremity of the cathedral town. It included some wretched suburban streets in the neighbourhood of the wharfs which bordered the river, but it likewise stretched far into the wild and wooded country upon the northern side of the city. Most wild and beautiful this tract was, composed of red sandstone and marl, with rocks and hills thickly covered by primeval woods, composed of the noble trees which, upon that substratum, usually attain to an almost fabulous size and beauty. The rocks broke forth in bold faces and precipices, forming deep valleys, which intersected these hills, the valleys being mostly traversed by clear mountain streams. The whole district was sylvan and solitary, scantily inhabited, and that chiefly by

charcoal-burners or miners, these latter finding employment where the geological structure admitted of veins of various metals being formed. The whole region was, perhaps, one of the wildest, most romantic, not to say most savage, to be found in the west of England.

The inhabitants of these regions, were, at that time of day, little removed from absolute barbarism. Utterly ignorant they were of the very rudest form of Christianity, gross, brutal, and depraved. They needed, indeed, the bold and enthusiastic spirit of a reformer to carry light and civilization among them.

The portion of the country, however, which bordered upon the town of M—— had not as yet, benefitted by any such exertions. Nothing could exceed the utter rudeness and want of all common civilization, of the place, when Mr. Gorhambury was first inducted into the living, except it may be, the state in which Mr. Lovel, after Mr. Gorhambury had ministered thereto ten long years, found it.

Such evils multiply immeasurably by neglect, and no parish had been more neglected, even in those days of supineness and indifference, than this.

But it is time to return to the dinner-table. There sits the Dean, his napkin tucked into his button-hole, enjoying his turbot and lobster sauce; and there sits the Rector, with his harsh, hard countenance, his black eye, and his cold but complacent smile, on the Dean's right hand. He is endeavouring to unite a flattery, but too agreeable to the somewhat spoiled dignitary, with the indulgence of a sarcastic spirit, but too agreeable to himself—for Mr. Gorhambury was a bitter man.

And now they have taken a glass of the Dean's most particular Madeira, wine that has travelled from tropic to tropic, and been hoarded in the spacious cellars of the deanery, nobody knows how long; and the Rector has pronounced it unrivalled, and is holding up his glass to catch the light upon it, from the brilliant pyramid of waxen candles that adorns the centre of the table, when his servant enters the room, comes up to him, and presents him with a letter sealed with black wax, saying that it has just arrived by express.

"Where from?—where from?"

"From Castle Avon, Sir," the man replies, in the humble subdued tone, with which

the reverend gentleman expects to be addressed by his inferiors.

Mr. Gorhambury started at the name, and with a "May I take the liberty?" to the Dean, hurriedly breaks the seal.

But scarcely had his eye glanced over three lines, than he started up with a suddenness that threatened to overset the table, and hastily turning to his dignified friend, said: "May I entreat a few moments' conversation with you in private?" hurriedly left the room. He was followed, with a little less precipitation by the courtly Dean, whom neither life nor death could move, to the undignified vulgarity of being in a hurry.

When the Dean reached the library to which Mr. Gorhambury had retreated, he found him with the letter held in both hands, reading it with an almost greedy impatience—seeming as if he would devour the contents with his eyes, which were staring widely, whilst his cheek was flushed, and his hair almost on end.

"What *can* have happened, my good Sir?" asked the Dean.

"My friend — my good friend — my dear friend," replies the other, in a tone of the utmost hurry and agitation. "Something so wholly unexpected—so extraordinary—so out of all calculation—so very strange—so very *dreadful!*" he added, as if recollecting himself, whilst his eyes were sparkling with exultation, and his lips vainly endeavouring not to smile. "Something so sad—so lamentable—" he was running on.

"Well, but what is it?" asks the Dean quietly.

He was a much more sensible, and a much more amiable person than his friend, as you have perhaps already discovered, and for which friend, well as he suited him in many respects, he entertained, at times, a little good-natured contempt.

"Let us know what it is—what has happened?"

"Oh! my dear friend, how shall I find words? So shocking an affair—so unexpected —so inconceivably wonderful—I declare to you,

it is the very last thing I ever thought of—never looked for it in the least—never contemplated the possibility of such a thing; far from any ambitious views in that direction—believe me, I am overwhelmed—confounded."

"Well, but what is it? have they made you Archbishop of Canterbury?" asked the Dean, with a slightly sarcastic smile.

"Oh! nothing in that way—nothing of that sort at all. Preferment in that line, whether merited or not, I never anticipated. My poor nephew, you know, was not one particularly—but good heavens! such a thing as this! Why, it is not to believed!" And he had recourse to his letter again.

The Dean began to be impatient to return to his dinner. The more so, perhaps, because after all he began to suspect that these demonstrations of emotion would end, as they had sometimes done before, in some matter of no very particular interest. So he rose from the chair into which he had thrown himself upon entering, and saying:

"Well, my dear Sir, they will be wondering

what we are about;" approached the Rector, as if to force on the explanation.

"Oh, my dear friend!" cried the other, seizing his hand with much effusion, "only think—only imagine—congratul—No, no—condole. I ask for your condolence, my dear friend, indeed I do. Aylmer died last night, and—and—and his poor little son—his heir—his only child—is gone too—is drowned!"

"This is very shocking intelligence, indeed," said the Dean, gravely.

"Is it not? As I said, dreadful! awful! terrible! The poor young man—my cousin—my own first cousin's son—the nearest relation he had in the world; and the little boy—the poor little child—drowned—Tuesday night! Let me see; yes, on that terrible Tuesday night—you recollect, Sir, what a storm it was. Crossing the mountains, had to pass Dana ford—waters swelled—child and steward both drowned! Would you like to read the letter?"

"Yes," said the Dean, taking it from his hand, and sitting down to peruse it, feeling, in truth, very much shocked.

Lord Aylmer had been universally beloved, and he could not so suddenly hear of the death of the amiable young nobleman without considerable emotion. The child too—the heir. Everybody takes a certain interest in a little boy of four years old, who is sole heir to a large property. It was very—very shocking!

The Dean took out his spectacles leisurely, and began to read the letter, whilst Mr. Gorhambury, in a state of excitement he found it impossible to master, perambulated the room with hasty steps; the extacy, the unbounded exultation with which the news had filled his bosom being unchecked by the slightest touch of genuine sympathy with so hideous a misfortune. The manifestation of his feelings, however, being a little restrained by his fear of displaying anything like indecent joy, before the man he was accustomed to look up to, and desired to stand well with.

He was as yet too new to the splendid prospects before him, to perceive that he and Mr. Dean, had, as far as worldly dignities were concerned, already changed places. One, whom he had regarded so long as his superior in every

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respect, he could not, all at once, bring himself to disregard.

The letter was from poor Willmore. He, all bewildered with the sudden responsibility which the death of the steward, following so speedily on that of his master, added to the violent illness of his lady, threw upon him, could think of nothing better to do, than address himself to one, whom all the world knew was, the child being no more, his master's next heir. But it had taken him, poor old man! a good many hours to collect his bewildered senses, sufficiently even to resolve upon this step; so it was not until the third day after the terrible disaster, and just as poor young Lady Aylmer was gradually being restored to her senses, that Mr. Gorhambury received the old servant's letter, which ran thus:

"Sir—or my Lord,

"As I believe I must call you henceforward, for there has been a dismal tragedy acted at this castle, and sad and dreadful is the news I take up my pen to convey.

"My dear lady, at present lying in her bed quite delirious, and, as the doctor thinks, in a dying state, or not likely to mend at least for a long time, being unable to give orders, so that we know not what to do; we think it right, Sir, that you should be informed without delay of what has happened. Oh, Sir! you must know, our honoured, and respected, and beloved master, young Lord Aylmer, whom we doted on as the apple of our eyes, as well and truly we may say; who was never strong, as doubtless you know; took on for worse last Tuesday was a sen'night. My lady had all the doctors in these parts, and they flattered her as how he was getting better, and would come round, and all be as usual again. But, somehow, my lady was not content—the more the pity—with her own country practitioners, who must have known our dear master best, seeing they had practised on him for so many years; and she must needs send express for some great man from London, who came down in a mighty hurry in a post-chaise and four; and no sooner does he set foot in the poor young lord's chamber—I misgave him from the first, seeing

he didn't half look like a great doctor, but just like another man for all the world—what do he, but say, as how all the other gentlemen has been doing is quite altogether right; but he alters the treatment nevertheless, and gives him a dose of physic, 'which,' says he, 'if it does not work its due effect, no power on earth can save him.'

"I saw Mr. Patten shake his head as he come out of the room, following the great doctor down stairs, so he couldn't see him; and shrug his shoulders to me, as much as to say, what I understood well enough; but my young lady believed the great man. And weeping, and weeping, she came down stairs; and he said:

"'My dear Lady Aylmer, be patient, be composed—there is still a chance.'

"'Oh, do not deceive me!' I heard her say, 'the truth—the whole truth.' And so the physic did no good, and the next morning it was settled among the doctors, that the poor young lord must be dead in twenty-four hours; and they told him so himself—enough to kill him outright—but, as I thought, he took

it wondrous firm; and so did my lady. Weeping, and weeping, and kissing him—kissing his forehead, and kissing his hands; but no screams, or hysterical like. And then that poor young couple settled to spend the short time allowed them together; but my lord wished to see his child, who was at his grandmother's; and so the roads being dreadful bad, besides a vast way round for a carriage, Mr. Yates, that is—that *was*, poor man, the steward, proposes he shall take a very steady mare of ours, honest Black Bess, and ride across the country, and bring the dear little gentleman home before him. And my young lady was charmed with the scheme, as thinking she should have the child in his poor father's arms all the sooner. But you know what a storm arose on Tuesday evening. Some say a water-spout fell in the mountains, for not in the memory of man has the Dana been known to be so swelled by many, many a foot; and crossing the ford in the dark, and the river so swelled, the poor creatures were both drowned—and the Lord have mercy upon their souls! The child, sweet innocent, is gone to be an angel in

heaven; and we will hope the best for poor Mr. Yates, who was an upright and honest man, though somewhat stern with the poor, and especially could not abide a vagrant, a squatter, or a gipsy—such as there may be too many in these parts. But, poor creatures! what are they to do? they can't rot in a jail—but, no more of that—and rest be to his spirit, for a more faithful steward, as regarded his master's monies, never lived; and if he was hard now and then with a poor servant, why he meant it for the best—so rest be to his soul. And so, honoured Sir, as I said, all of us poor servants being at a loss what to do, we have agreed to send express to you, as being our late honoured lord's nearest relation; and, the poor young gentleman being lost, as we believe, his Lordship's next heir. And waiting your honour's commands,

"I am, obediently, your humble servant,

"My Lord,

"THOMAS WILLMORE."

The Dean folded the letter deliberately, with this remark:

"I did not know that the title descended to collaterals."

"Nor does it," answered his friend, turning quickly round.

"The estate is entailed, I conclude?"

"Strictly."

"And you stand next in the entail?"

"Unquestionably. What could make you doubt it?"

"It is a difficult matter what to say, in a contingency such as this," the Dean continued, after a pause, and rising deliberately from his chair. "One cannot congratulate a man upon a succession which falls to him under such pathetic circumstances. All I can say is—as fall the succession must upon some one—I am glad it has fallen upon you."

"Thank you, thank you!"

"And now, shall we return to the dining-room?"

"No, you will excuse me; I shall set forwards immediately: my presence must be required at the castle. I will take leave to ring the bell, and order a chaise and pair from the 'Eagle,' without delay. I shall just

stop for a moment at home, to communicate the intelligence to Mrs. Gorhambury, and then hasten onwards as speedily as possible. I shall reach Castle Avon by breakfast-time to-morrow morning."

"Do you know much of the unfortunate young widow?"

"Very little—except that she was a great beauty. The poor young lord met with her in some out-of-the-way place. She was a daughter of nobody, I believe. I have seen her only once or twice; thought her an ordinary creature, but undoubtedly handsome."

"Well then, as there seems nothing more to be said, I think that I will return to the dining-room. They will be wondering what can have become of us; and the venison will be quite cold. Won't you have a slice brought in here, and another glass or two of Madeira, to fortify yourself against the journey? I shall hear from you, no doubt; and if you can make any use of me, command me."

"Thank you—thank you; I will be sure

to write. Nothing—nothing; I am too much did agitated to taste a morsel; but a glass of Madeira—yes, if you please, a glass of Madeira."

A quarter of an hour more, and Mr. Gorhambury's chaise was heard rattling at a rapid pace from the Deanery door.

CHAPTER IV.

The mourner had enjoyed some refreshing sleep that night, and she awoke pressing the little glove to her bosom, and with a sensation of renewed strength, which led to the fond hope that she should be able to rise, and renew her search that very day.

The morning broke calm and bright, and the September sun gleamed through her half-opened curtains; the pale blue mists swelled up between the trees, and their shadows fell upon the shining grass; the autumn birds were whistling and calling.

She had the night before fastened the precious little glove to a slender gold chain, and

attached it round her neck; and never did Catholic with more emotion press a saintly relic to his heart, than she this little vestige of her child. And never did enthusiast with more holy hope regard his reliquary, than she hers—she treasured it as the assurance that her child lived.

In the certainty that he lived, she never wavered for a moment. She looked upon this as a most indisputable fact, and expected that all the world would regard it in the same light.

Her impatience to rise and proceed in the search, was therefore intense; and without waiting to call her maid, who was sleeping upon a sofa in the dressing-room adjoining, she determined to rise, and begin to dress herself, for to lie in bed quietly any longer, seemed impossible. So she tried to rise.

But alas! no sooner did she endeavour to do so, than insupportable pains seized her, and, with a scream of agony, she was obliged to throw herself back upon her bed.

Her maid was startled at the sound, and hurried to her. With her assistance she again

endeavoured to raise herself; in vain, for the present the use of the lower limbs seemed totally lost. Once convinced of this, the poor mother, without speaking, laid herself down again, in bitter resignation; pressed the little glove more closely than ever to her bosom, turned her face to her pillow, and wept.

"Don't cry so—don't, Madam; have patience, you will soon be better."

"But time! time!" she cried out aloud, "oh, precious—precious time! And my boy! —my poor, helpless little boy!—where is he? where is he?"

The maid shook her head, and a tear was in her eye.

"And you, too!" cried the mother, with almost violence; "one and all of you—are you in a conspiracy to rob me of my child? I tell you, woman, he is alive—I am certain he is alive."

The eye of the attendant glanced involuntarily at the poor little drenched and faded hat, with its broken uncurled feather. The lady had ordered it to be hung upon the wall,

close by the bed, from whence she could at all times see it.

"Yes, I know—I know. The hat was drenched, but the glove was *dry*. The hat might have fallen off into the river, but how could the glove be dry?"

Alas poor thing! but *was* the glove dry? Every one but herself were satisfied that the glove was *not* dry—every one but the poor mother.

Now, the little glove was a somewhat remarkable little affair; and a prettier one never had been drawn upon an infant hand. It had been made by the proud and happy mother herself; and in fanciful imitation of the ornamented gauntlet of old days. It was of buff leather, such as riding-gloves are now made of, but of the softest and finest description that could be obtained. Lady Aylmer had lined it with blue silk and cotton-wool, and finished it like a little old-fashioned horseman's glove; it was pinked and beautifully embroidered with a tiny pattern in blue silk. And proud and happy had both mother and child been, when these gloves were worn.

It would appear that the nurse—the weather being fine when Mr. Yates and his charge set out—had dressed the little boy in his best clothes, and had put on these favourite gloves to please her lady, as she thought.

The poor thing had good reason for laying so much stress upon the circumstance of the glove being dry. It had been found close by the river, but half-hidden under a broad leaf of one of those gigantic bur-thistles which are seen by the way-side in desolate places; and this had served in some degree to shelter it from the heavy rain, so, that though it was indeed a little damped and stained, it had not been drenched, and the lining was perfectly dry, and not in the least discoloured. Evidence conclusive for her, though, as it appeared, little regarded by any one else, that the little wearer must have reached the shore.

Will, who found it, said it was wet when he picked it up; and every one felt so convinced that the child was in fact drowned, that they troubled themselves not with minute details. The little drenched hat was proof enough for them.

Lady Aylmer was a woman of a strong and determined will, sweet as was the character of her beauty, and gentle and soft as was her usual demeanour. She had that good gift, which the French express by the words, *avoir du caractère*, and for which our language wants an equivalent; for when I use, for want of a better term, that of determined will, I seem to imply a something of obstinacy or wilfulness, which I do not intend. Lady Aylmer was neither obstinate nor wilful; but once convinced that she was right, she was not to be deterred from pursuing the course, her persuasions indicated.

She was neither to be flattered, nor frightened, nor tempted by indolence or secret misgivings, from following up what she thought it right and best to do.

And now, unhappy creature! behold her with her unchanging conviction that the child still lived—that in some extraordinary manner or other, it had reached the land, and on the land dropped its glove—chained down powerless, to her sick bed, and obliged in the most desperate circumstances of her life to act by deputy

she, who even in the smallest circumstances, held it as a maxim that what is done by deputy is but half done.

But her clear and strong faculties did not forsake her. Her mother's love, the very intensity of that anxiety which would have unnerved many another, only seemed to give additional force to her power of self-command; enabling her to collect her thoughts with astonishing calmness, and consider what course, under the circumstances, it would be most advisable to pursue.

So finding it impossible to quit her bed, she resigned herself to her fate, and lay for some little time collecting her thoughts and spirits; then she desired Willmore to be sent for.

The old man entered the room; aged, as it would seem, almost ten years by the events of the last two days. He looked, moreover, particularly nervous and uncomfortable. He had not in the least expected—for the medical practitioner had held out no hope of the kind—that his lady would be so far restored to herself in this short period of time, as to

be able to attend to business and to give directions; and as, upon their interview of the evening before, she had not said a word about sending for Mr. Gorhambury, he felt uneasy as to the propriety of having taken that measure upon himself; and with the want of moral courage common to ordinary minds, had not ventured to mention what he had done to Lady Aylmer. So he was much humbled in spirit, and came in looking more uncomfortable than was quite compatible with the joy he ought naturally to have felt at seeing her restored to the possession of her reason. As he came up to the bedside, his wrinkled hands trembled a good deal.

"Come hither, Willmore: I have much to say to you," she began, struggling hard to preserve the composure she had with so much effort attained. "Don't stand, sit down; I shall talk better with you when you are seated."

"No, Madam—pray—please—I would rather stand."

"You have taken the proper steps towards the arrangement of the funeral of my dear Lord Aylmer?" she said, steadily. "Right. But

there is a matter more important than that—the child—"

"Alas! Madam, why will you flatter yourself?" stammered out the old man. "There is nothing more to be done; the stream has run down to its usual channel, and nothing can we find but the hat."

"You told me so before. The hat proves nothing. I must have stronger evidence than that, before I will be convinced that my child did not come to land."

"And what can your Ladyship think has become of him—of them?"

"*That* is the mystery; but they were not drowned. Depend upon it, *that* shore they reached. Now, Willmore, I must have better advice and assistance than you can give me, my good old man. But in the first place, I must have a reward of five thousand pounds immediately offered, and printed papers published to that effect throughout the country—throughout the kingdom—throughout the empire—throughout Europe." She went on with increasing energy, "Five thousand pounds to any one who will restore that child alive. Send, therefore,

to Mr. Saxston, whom your lord once employed about some business or other. Now that poor Yates is gone, I have no one else I know to apply to—so send for Mr. Saxston."

Willmore hesitated.

"Why do you hesitate to obey me?" she said, with a slight accent of displeasure.

"Mr. Saxston has been here already, my lady, and he says—"

"Been here! And what brought him here, without being sent for?" she exclaimed, with some surprise. "Well, well, well, that is no affair of yours. If he is still in the castle, send him up to me."

Willmore obeyed instantly.

Mr. Saxston was not gone, and in about a quarter of an hour, which seemed as an age to the impatience of Lady Aylmer, a low and very humble sort of knock, was heard at the door, and upon the lady's-maid opening it, the limb of the law presented himself. He came in with a profound bow, and then, upon a sign from Lady Aylmer, approached the bed, his counte-

nance all the time expressing the deepest grief, awe, and commiseration, that it was possible for countenance to express.

Mr. Saxston was a middle-sized man, with a lean figure, and a face that it was impossible to look upon, without a certain feeling of dislike. His keen grey eye, deep set in his head, looked out from under his contracted brows—contracted, not so much with thought, as with that kind of ingenuity which men employ to detect a puzzle—rather keenly searching what was without, then engaged with that which lay within. His mouth was thin and false—his aspect hungry, wily, and yet with a certain servility about him that was altogether displeasing.

Lady Aylmer had never seen him before, and the moment she looked upon him she was sorry he had been called. He came up to her bedside, however, with an air of such profound commiseration and respect, that the next moment she was angry at herself, for taking such an unjustifiable prejudice against any one.

"I sent for you, Mr. Saxston, because I am deprived of the power of acting for myself; and

the deplorable events of the last two days, have rendered the utmost expedition and energy necessary."

Mr. Saxston sighed, and looked down.

"You are aware," she went on with rapidity, half raising herself in her bed, and her eyes flashing with impatience and anxiety as she spoke, "that my child, my boy, has disappeared, and that we have been unable to obtain the slightest trace of him—except, indeed, this," she added, lifting up the glove from her bosom. "You observe it is *dry*. The child came to land; somewhere he is, and he must be found."

"Found!" repeated Mr. Saxston, turning his eyes, like the rest, from the glove, as of a matter of no account. "No doubt, my lady, he will be found."

"You say so!" she exclaimed, with almost a shriek of joy.

Again Mr. Saxston's countenance assumed the most lamentable expression, as he added: "I am much afraid that he will be found as it will give you little comfort to find him."

She looked stunned for a moment, at this sudden destruction of the wild hope which his

first sentence had excited; then she collected herself, and, with great steadiness and seriousness, said:

"Mr. Saxston, I see you have taken up the same unfounded impression as the rest. I am convinced it is a mistaken one; and it is my firm faith that God, in His own good time, will restore my child to me. I believe in His Providence, Sir; and I do *not* believe that He would have implanted this deep, this rooted conviction in a wretched mother's mind, to deceive and disappoint her. I beg, therefore, if you are inclined to undertake this business for me, that, in what you are about to do you will dismiss from your mind every impression or prejudice you may have taken up, and act in all things as though you as implicitly believed as I do, that the child lives, and has, in some mysterious manner, disappeared. Is what I honestly demand possible? Can you promise me that in this manner you will attend to my convictions, and energetically act up to them, as if they were your own?"

"I hope Lady Aylmer only does me justice in believing, that if she is pleased to confide any

business to me, I shall act as if it were herself. Her impressions and convictions shall be made my own. What would she wish to have done?"

"In the first and immediate place, before you leave this house, take measures for advertising the child in every paper, of every description, in the united kingdom; and for having handbills instantly printed, and circulated as widely as it is possible, promising a reward of five thousand pounds upon recovery of the child alive."

The man of the law took care not to shake his head at what he considered, a vain and useless expense; that was no affair of his, at least.

"We must have an exact description of the young gentleman," he said; "and if he had any particular mark upon the body, by which he might be identified, it would be well—"

"What use in that? the child was only lost on Tuesday night! No! I know of no such mark. Do you think we shall not recognise one another when we meet?" she added, with a certain contempt.

The attorney was silent, as if waiting for more; and then the poor mother, her cheek

reddening and her eyes glistening as she spoke, with some impetuosity, went on:

"He is not quite four years old, but with the intelligence of a being twice his age. Large blue eyes, fair complexion, flaxen hair, hanging in large curls all round his little neck; a full mouth, like an opening rosebud; a nose of the sweetest proportions; little chubby hands and arms; limbs like transparent wax. Oh, my child! my infant! my lovely, lovely, beauteous boy!"—and she hastily sank down in her bed, and covered herself with the bed-clothes. She conquered her emotion, and uncovering her face, again looked up.

"This lovely description will do much," said the lawyer; "but it is usual in advertisements of this nature to mention clothes. Is your ladyship aware what clothes the unfortunate young gentleman had on upon this disastrous night."

"No, I am not; but it will be easy to inquire. Though poor Mr. Yates has disappeared with him, the nurse, who is still at my mother's—stupid! I quite forgot to send for her—can give us every particular of this sort.

Let her be fetched instantly. When you have given directions as to this, I will see you again. There are many things, I know, which will require immediate attention—things which my dear lord confided to me during our last conversations, and particularly begged of me not to neglect.

"I had forgotten all that," she said, passing her hand over her forehead; "but your presence reminds me that there is much that is pressing to be arranged as regards this property, and which, though you are employed upon what I so earnestly and impatiently desire to see done, must be looked into without delay. I will endeavour to collect my scattered thoughts, and inform you of certain things which my dear lord looked upon as urgent, being important to the security of others, and of some matters of business connected with the estate. Had poor Mr. Yates been here, there would have been no difficulty. My lord told me that he had the threads of all these matters in his hands, but the change of circumstances will make—will make— I will try to remember all about it, whilst you are engaged in what I ask of you."

"Business!—affairs connected with the estate!" muttered Mr. Saxston, half audibly. "Would it not be better, my lady, to postpone such things until the arrival of Mr. Gorhambury?"

"The arrival of Mr. Gorhambury! And who, pray, sent for Mr. Gorhambury?"

"I understand that he is hourly expected. The express returned with the assurance that he would be here as soon as it was possible. Indeed, Mr. Gorhambury had already started in a post-chaise and four when the man left G."

"This *is* news to me, Sir!" said Lady Aylmer, coldly. "And pray, may I ask, were you so obliging as to send for Mr. Gorhambury before communicating with me?"

"Oh dear, no, Lady Aylmer! how could I presume?"

"Then who did?"

"I believe, poor Willmore; he really was so frightened and put about, what with the lamentable events which had occurred, and what with your ladyship's most unfortunate illness and incapacity to give orders, that he naturally thought the best thing to do was to send for

Lord Aylmer's nearest relation and next heir, and so discharge his responsibility upon him."

"Nearest relation! next heir!"

Her countenance became suddenly overcast.

For the first time the uncertainty whether her son yet lived assumed a new form. She had, in her grief at the loss, never till now adverted to the consequences of his death. It had seemed to her that her incredulity on this point—her conviction that he lived—was a matter which concerned herself alone. Alas! now, it appeared to her far otherwise. More interests were involved in the event. Her intense persuasion, her unwavering convictions, would avail her nothing. What, if she could not *prove* that her son lived? What, if the evidence which appeared to her so conclusive, should have as little weight with the world in general, as it had among her own servants? What would her passionate asseverations avail? The prospect became dark; yet amidst all that darkness, her own faith wavered not. She knew that she should find her child again; but how would it be? when? where? how?

She was silent for some time; then a ray of light broke over the prospect; and with a countenance radiant with newly-awakened hope, she turned to the attorney, and said:

"It lies with *you* to prove the fact of the child's death, before his inheritance can be wrested from him by another."

A light seemed to flash into the attorney's brain too, at these words; he started, then recollected himself, and said, quietly and sadly:

"I am afraid the proof is more complete than your ladyship is willing to admit. No rational creature can doubt that the child perished with the steward in the waters."

"I do not admit it—I never will—I never shall. To my grave I shall carry the conviction that my child is living at this very moment."

A slight smile passed over the attorney's lips.

"I understand you," she cried eagerly; "you mean that this conviction of mine will be of no avail as regards others—be it so."

She stopped, fixed her eyes, sharpened by all a mother's intelligence, upon the attorney—eyes, that looked as if they would search his soul.

"You are acquainted, perhaps, with Mr. Gorhambury?" she said at length.

"Slightly."

"You have known him before, it seems?"

"We have met once or twice."

"You are—to cut the matter short—his friend, perhaps?"

"That would be too great an honour to assume to myself."

"Thank you, Sir; I will not trouble you with the execution of the commission I confided to you just now. My views are altered. Let me not take up more of your time; I wish you a good morning."

"Nay, Madam," assuming an offended air, "if you doubt my honour—if, because I have the privilege to know and to respect Mr. Gorhambury, you doubt the sincere interest I take in everything that concerns yourself, you do me injustice—you do me great injustice, Madam."

"Poor creatures, so heart-distracted as I am, are but too apt to be unjust. Forgive me, Sir. I throw myself upon your candour."

And her hand laid hold of the bell-pull.

She rang it with emphasis, though not with violence.

"Good morning, Sir; I am sorry to have taken up your time. Letty," as the maid opened the door, "show Mr. Saxston down stairs."

CHAPTER V.

THE two men sat together in what had been the young Lord Aylmer's room of business; not his library, which was a spacious apartment, very magnificently fitted up, and filled with costly volumes; it having been left so by the late lord, a proud man, and fond of ostentatious expense. A strong contrast in this, as in many other things, with his single-minded son.

The library was, in truth, a very fine room, of grand proportions, finely ceiled and ornamented, with the book-cases only too richly carved and gilded, the tables only too beautifully inlaid and painted, the bindings of the

books only too rich and splendid; a room for display, not use, with its crimson velvet and vast chairs, its carpets and stoves, and so on. The chamber in which these two men were sitting was small and simply furnished, with everything in it for use, and nothing for display, filled with the records of a good and useful life: a life such as that of this young nobleman, cut off thus in his prime, had been. There was a table of considerable size, covered with papers, tied up and docketted; his own desk upon one side of it; and the desk of Mr. Yates, who often laboured with him in works of mercy, upon the other.

Lord Aylmer had been the encourager of every plan for improving and civilizing the semi-barbarous neighbourhood in which he lived, and in all his schemes for the public good was most strenuously supported by Mr. Yates.

Perhaps that gentleman, who was of a somewhat stern and uncompromising, though most righteous nature, might be inclined to strain matters a little too far, where the punishment of vagrancy, idleness, petty depredations, and

such like delinquencies were concerned. He had been brought up in a rigid school of morals—he hated vice, and detested profligacy and disorder. Even positive crime was to him almost more tolerable than the gross dissoluteness of habit which characterised too many of the people around him. Therefore, when he pounced upon any one offending, in those minor matters, which he felt assured were the introduction as well as the incentives to greater disorders, Mr. Yates was, perhaps, inclined to deal rather too harshly with the culprit. At least, so thought the common people; and whilst they adored Lord Aylmer for the sweetness of his manners, the liberality of his habits, and the generous regard he showed to their best interests—they detested the steward, to whom they attributed every act of severity, however necessary or called for it might be, feeling assured that the young Lord, uninfluenced, would never have brought himself to decide upon it. In which opinion they were mistaken; for Lord Aylmer, though of a more lenient temper than Mr. Yates, knew well that to rule with a slack and negligent

hand, is one of the greatest injuries a superior can inflict upon his dependants. But this by the way.

Both were now gone to their account. The young nobleman cut off by sudden illness, the steward lost on that terrible night.

The two men, or gentlemen rather, for it was no other than Mr. Gorhambury and Mr. Saxston, who now occupied their places, sat together and discoursed in this very room where those so different had so few days ago consulted. Oh! how was the very spirit of the place changed.

They discoursed not in the cheerful tones which had sounded in that chamber, when men were occupied with schemes for the benefit of others, with pleasant projects for the promotion of industry and improvement, and with bright prospects of progressive good.

No—these sat, their heads bent over the table, talking in low tones, scarcely audible even to each other; and this is what they were saying.

"The lady seems invincibly persuaded that the child lives," the lawyer had been observing;

"and perfectly irrational as is the idea, and as such, discarded by every other living being, still this intimate persuasion may offer considerable difficulties to the arrangement of the late Lord Aylmer's affairs."

"You call it intimate persuasion, conviction, and so on," said Mr. Gorhambury, rather impatiently. "I should rather call it obstinate determination to cling to a position, and hold fast a property, to which she cannot now have the shadow of a claim."

"I wish I could see it exactly in that light," replied Mr. Saxston; "but, upon matters of importance like this, it is always my habit to deliver my impressions, however unpalatable; and I am sorry to say, that in matters of this nature, the strong, sincere convictions of one mind, will often produce an almost infectious influence upon the minds of others. And, I am persuaded that it is with a sincere conviction, and not the affectation of it to serve a purpose, that we have to do here. The mother's heart is a strong thing, it will cling tenaciously to hope—even to the impossible, as it appears to others—and that with an energy of persuasion

which sometimes ends in affecting the opinions of the most incredulous. I declare to you, Sir, upon my honour, absolutely convinced as I am that the child is drowned, convinced of this fact as every reasonable creature must be, still whilst Lady Aylmer was passionately repeating her own convictions, I could scarcely keep myself from being moved by them."

At this, Mr. Gorhambury lifted up his large, dark, hard eyes, and fixed them upon the speaker with an expression in which displeasure and astonishment were almost equally mingled. The few words he uttered were:

"If such be the bent of your mind, you are not the man for me."

"I beg your pardon; you altogether misconceive the drift of my argument. I only intended to say, that if such an effect could by possibility be produced upon me, who am as *certain* the child is drowned as if I had seen it, what may we not have reason to apprehend, should the poor lady persist in her incredulity, and offer obstructions to your obtaining possession of that, which by all laws divine and human, is now your own."

"Pooh!" said Mr. Gorhambury, with some contempt, "what could she do? The child is dead. It is evidently her interest to retain possession—as she seems pretty much determined to do — but this is so palpably and evidently absurd, that I cannot have a moment's apprehension upon the subject."

The lawyer seemed to put on his considering-cap, and after twisting his mouth and pulling his face into every conceivable wrinkle which would demonstrate profound thought, he said:

"The case is a new one. I am not aware that any such has occurred before; but I will consult my books—I will consult my books—"

"And supposing it were a new one, as you say," replied Mr. Gorhambury, with a good deal of acerbity of tone, "can that make any difference? Why, an heir might be kept out of possession to all eternity in this way, by a foolish and envious woman. Absurd! The child is lost, drowned, or otherwise made away with; what matters it? The child is gone, and I remain the undeniable heir. Besides, who is to oppose me? I am in possession now, and

upon what principle on earth can I be disturbed?"

"I don't know what the means, or powers may be, which Lady Aylmer possesses for establishing the claims of her son; but of this fact I feel assured—her persuasion that he still lives is so intimate, that I am convinced every obstruction she can make, will be made."

"She had better take care, she had better look well, before she involves herself in a fruitless contest of this kind. My dispositions at present are very friendly towards her. She may be more dependant upon them than she is aware. The exact conditions of her marriage settlement I am ignorant of; but I know the old lord set himself violently against the match, and, as I heard at the time, made a very slender provision for his future daughter-in-law."

"But I fancy the young lord rectified this by his will. At least, from a few words dropped by Lady Aylmer just now—when, upon a second interview, I carried her the advertisement I had drawn up, and ventured upon some representations, as to the large sum of five thousand pounds reward—telling her that, as it was

offered by herself alone, she might be called upon to be answerable for the whole—she only replied: 'Have no uneasiness upon that score, my dear Lord Aylmer has taken good care that I shall never want for five, nor for ten thousand pounds.'"

"No will, however, has been found—for, as my most sacred duty demanded, I have made every inquiry upon the subject. Old Willmore could only tell me, that if there was a will, it was made, he doubted not, by Mr. Yates, who was a lawyer by profession, and was accustomed, it seems, to draw up legal documents for his master."

"Ten to one then, even should the will be found, that it will prove not worth a rush," said the attorney, turning up his nose. "Old women's nostrums, and lay law — much the same thing—much the same thing."

"But you forget, Mr. Yates was a lawyer by profession."

"Does not much help the matter; and yet I own I wish there may be no will, for the lady, if she have money, may manage to give us a good deal of trouble."

"As how? explain."

"Does Mr. Gorhambury forget," drawing closer to him and looking him steadily in the face, "the damning fact, that the body has *not* been found."

"How could it, when it has no doubt been swept into the sea?"

"Ay, ay, not the slightest doubt of the *fact*; but the evidence, the point of law, how far the death can be considered proved, so as to convey the property to the next heir, when the body has not been found, that is the question."

And again he puckered up his face into every conceivable wrinkle.

"I wish the body could be found."

"So do I, with all my heart, and it is the only possible way that suggests itself to me of solving the difficulty. For," added he, in a lower and confidential tone, taking hold of Mr. Gorhambury by the arm, a familiarity which that gentleman somewhat proudly repulsed, "that the testament will turn up somewhere or other, I have no doubt; and, if the lady have power given by it—which I doubt not to a

considerable degree she has—the trouble she may give will be infinite. I don't see my way through it—I don't see my way through it, unless the body could be found."

"Is it utterly out of the question, that the body may yet be found?" asked Mr. Gorhambury. "Only three days have elapsed. The search being entrusted to servants most probably was negligent—"

"I think it is not impossible that the body may *yet* be found," said the lawyer significantly.

Mr. Gorhambury suddenly lifted up his eyes: a rapid glance of intelligence was exchanged between the two men—a glance which Mr. Gorhambury could not but understand, though he tried hard, then, and thenceforward, and to the end of his days to forget it—but he could not. He dropped his eyes as hastily as he had raised them, and Mr. Saxston went on.

"The lady has offered five thousand pounds for the production of the living child. Are you inclined to give as much for that of the body of the dead one? I don't mean," he went on, observing Mr. Gorhambury change colour;

and, from the sudden flush of dark red which had suffused his cheek and temples, when their eyes met, turn black and pale. "I don't recommend that such a reward, should be published in the open manner Lady Aylmer is doing. But might I be assured—am I at liberty, privately to assure any man, *sub rosâ*, that five thousand pounds, will by you be paid down, to be divided in equitable shares, among all, and any, who may be instrumental in discovering the child's dead body?"

"Ye-es—ye-es—you may—" in a smothered half-inaudible tone.

Mr. Saxston turned aside, took up pen and paper, and hastily wrote a few words.

"Then Mr. Gorhambury will, perhaps, sign this. I do not," he went on, as he held the paper in his hand, "all that is sacred forbid that I should ask Mr. Gorhambury to put his name to any paper, that can in the least degree compromise his high and holy character or calling. This paper, even if produced—and I swear solemnly never to produce it—could not throw the slightest imputation upon his rectitude and fairness. Every man in his

circumstances, must be most anxious to have the mystery cleared up, and, in taking possession of an estate like this, to be assured that he is not wronging a living child. What can be more natural, what more right, than such a manner of thinking."

"Then why not do it openly?" muttered Mr. Gorhambury.

"Because it might have a bad effect; because, if it come to a jury—which sooner or later, if the lady have the means, rest assured it will—it might have a bad effect, it might discredit even the identity of the body. Lady Aylmer would not believe, even if she saw the body drawn out of the water, changed and discoloured as it must be—"

Mr. Gorhambury began to look sick and disgusted.

"All I mean is," continued Mr. Saxston, "that with such a determination to oppose as I fear we shall find in Lady Aylmer, a question might be raised, *even* if the body—which I hope and believe it will yet be—were produced. And she might bring the matter to a jury; and in that case, it strikes me that it

would not look well for the heir-at-law to have put forth an advertisement, and offered a reward of this description; a proceeding which the mother had judged to be unnecessary—nay, undesirable: these are my reasons. Will Mr. Gorhambury sign the paper?"

Mr. Gorhambury took the pen which the attorney presented, but he still hesitated.

"If that paper is signed," said the lawyer, "I will engage that the body will be found; and," he added, in a low tone, "if there be no will, Mr. Gorhambury is established in his rights at once. Sign, Sir, and trust the rest to me."

I have seen the signature: it put me in mind of that of Guy Fawkes under pressure of the torture, so rough and unsteady was the hand-writing. The paper was signed, however, and without turning his head towards him, Mr. Gorhambury reached the paper to the solicitor, who thereupon rose, and immediately left the room.

Mr. Gorhambury could not rest that night.

It was past midnight, and the whole of the castle was profoundly still. Deep sleep, the sleep of sorrow and exhaustion, had fallen upon all the domestics; relieved, by the arrival of one asserting authority among them, from their perplexities and anxieties. For those who are accustomed to be directed, and to obey others, seem to lose the faculty of going alone, and acting for themselves in emergencies; they are lost and bewildered, when there is no longer a controlling hand.

So one and all of the household, who had been unable to rest in peace for the three preceding nights, now wearied out, and heavy with sadness and grief, slumbered profoundly. Even poor Lady Aylmer slept. The doctor had given her a sedative draught, without her knowledge, indeed; for she, impressed with the importance of the crisis in which she stood, would have wished, though at the cost of a sleepless night, to preserve her faculties alive for reflection. The medical man, however, judged differently, and a pretty considerable dose of morphine had triumphed alike over grief and anxiety.

Everybody slumbered but Mr. Gorhambury; but he had murdered sleep.

What he had done—the recollection of that glance from the attorney, clung to him with the tenacity of the fatal garment: he could not shake it off. Fain would he have satisfied himself with the assurance that it was fancy, unfounded, simple weakness, nervous agitation; that the man was an honest man: that he never thought or intended wrong.

It would not do. The instinct within insisted that wrong was intended, some deception, some trick, to say the least of it.

Well, and if there were a little deception practised, that vile casuist which is the devil's advocate within a man's breast began to say, well, and if there were, nothing worse is intended than to prove a fact which has unquestionably taken place, and establish a right without controversy in the eyes of the law, which is already fully established in *foro conscientiæ*, in the eyes of all just and reasonable men. Mr. Gorhambury could not have been a member of his sacred profession so long without possessing an enlightened conscience so far as the percep-

tion of what was right or wrong went; but alas! for him, he had unholy hands, and a seared and hardened heart. He could not have indulged his pride, and his covetousness, and his love of this world so many years, whilst pronouncing condemnation upon them every Sunday, without having lost all the vitality of the moral sense, all the purity and singleness of the will. Every day of his life had been a covert breach of his Christian profession; but enough of the memory of what was right remained to render him an uncomfortable, though an unsoftened sinner.

To do him justice, however, it must be acknowledged that his conviction of the death of the child was as complete as conviction could be. We are all easily to be persuaded the way our interests incline. The mother could not be more determined in her unbelief, than was Mr. Gorhambury in his certainty, that the child had perished, and that he was the rightful owner of this large property, long and enviously coveted.

To have his title disputed, and upon such vague and unsatisfactory reasons, on account of

difficulties—he could not, and would not call them doubts—which might never by possibility be cleared away; to have this fine property fall into the clutches of the law, and be finally swallowed up in the interminable labyrinths of Chancery, might have been enough to vex many a better man.

He was dissatisfied, little delicate as was his mind, with what had passed; and yet when he asked himself whether he would retract the consent, I have spoken of, bluntly answered, what could he have done better?

Whom did he wrong? Whom did he defraud, but a set of hungry lawyers who would have fastened like vultures upon this rich inheritance, by thus allowing Mr. Saxston—to do what? Obtain evidence—fair, undeniable evidence of the child's death.

Well, what harm is there in that? persisted the demon within. And then he managed, as it were, to distend himself so as to hide what Mr. Gorhambury knew was to be hidden—namely, the certainty he himself felt, that it was by unconfessed means that Mr. Saxston intended to carry his point.

So thus dissatisfied with himself, nervous, restless, uneasy, his conscience tormenting, and doubts and fears invading him on every side, Mr. Gorhambury kept walking up and down his room.

Suddenly, a new and more horrible thought presented itself. The Lady Aylmer! What if she should after all possess the means? what if she should still persevere in her incredulity, take legal measures to disprove his evidence, and discover — Expose him! disgrace him, perhaps! Oh, how he wished now that he had stood firm against Mr. Saxston's persuasions: then that paper!—the damning evidence of that paper glared like a spectre before his eyes! How could he have been so mad, so infatuated, as to trust such a document in the hands of one of whom he thought so meanly —so ill?

The irritation of his anxiety became intolerable. In such temperaments as Mr. Gorhambury's, irritation once excited, is apt to mount to a degree perfectly insupportable. Unrepressed and unsoftened by the influence of higher and better feelings, to be vexed, as it

is called, at one's self, drives the patient half mad.

The room seemed to stifle him. He opened the door; it led into a large corridor overlooking the hall and running upon three sides of it. into which the doors of the several bed-rooms opened. Upon the side exactly opposite to the one in which he now stood was the late Lord Aylmer's room.

The young nobleman was lying there in a sort of state. The day had been too hurried and busied with many things for Mr. Gorhambury as yet to have visited the remains of his young kinsman. A sudden impulse led him to resolve upon doing it now.

I do not know how it was, whether he felt as if there might be something in the aspect of death to calm the agitating contentions of his spirit; or whether it were a sudden wish and curiosity to see one whom he had rarely seen, and to whom, by the very circumstance of being his heir, he now felt bound by a sort of close and peculiar tie—I know not and it matters not.

A moment he paused. He stood there with his candle in his hand, irresolute. Then he

looked down into the dark, dim hall, filled with various trophies of hunting or of war, and where the banners of departed worthies were hanging in a sort of sullen pomp.

The great hall clock went tick-tack, tick-tack, measuring unheeded time. Not a sound was to be heard. The profound, the intense weight of utterly unbroken silence pressed upon him, and a sort of mysterious horror crept over his spirit. But by a sort of infatuation, this very horror seemed to draw him towards the chamber of death. He crept stealthily along the corridor, reached, and laid his hand upon the door of death's chamber.

He listened before turning the lock—all was quite—quite still. He opened the door, and the solemn aspect of death was before him. The bed upon which the coffin lay, was an antique bed with heavy, green velvet curtains, sweeping, and indeed lying in heavy folds upon the floor. Plumes of feathers crowned the angles of the cornices ; upon the mattress was spread a velvet pall which, ornamented with the escutcheons of the deceased, swept the floor. On this was placed the open coffin covered with

black velvet, richly ornamented, and lined with white satin, and a fine sheet of fair linen concealed the form within. The room was lighted with huge wax tapers, which threw quite a blaze upon this dark furniture of death.

A door at the other end of the apartment was open. It led into another chamber, which had indeed been Lady Aylmer's dressing-room; and here the attendants in charge, some upon sofas, and others in arm-chairs, might have been seen in different attitudes of repose, and all fast asleep.

Mr. Gorhambury was not a man of an imagination easily affected, yet there was something in the profound stillness of the scene, the funeral array—the blazing lights—living lights blazing there all alone, around the dead, like living lamps in a sepulchre, which struck him forcibly; and with noiseless steps, and something like reverence and awe in his aspect, he approached and lifted up the sheet, to gaze upon the face of the dead. There it lay in its breathless impassibility, that waxen mysterious image, which at once is and is not—he who has been.

The beautiful countenance of Lord Aylmer lay there white as the sculptured marble upon a tomb, his fair hair flowing round it, his features displayed in all their exquisite proportions, wrapt in what appeared a sort of extatic repose.

He looked upon him—that hard, worldly, interested, heart-seared man, looked upon him with a sort of envying wonder. Would his end be like this? Would he repose in this tranquillity of the blessed? Would he when, in his turn, he lay, perhaps upon that very bed, and in that very state, would his face, be, as it were, an earnest of a world of just men made perfect, where the blessed dwell?

Thoughts akin to these rarely visited this world-hardened man; but they came now, with a sort of sad solemnity; and something softer, better, purer, seemed to allay the vexation of his labouring spirit.

———

So he stood; and, oh; divine influence of the

chamber of death, at last his knees began to bend. An inclination rare, rare with him—churchman alas! as he was—stole over him: his better angel seemed to whisper, and he was sinking into the attitude of secret prayer, when alas! alas! as his foot moved the heavy fold of the velvet curtain, a something white —a paper—two or three papers—caught his eye.

They seemed to have been shuffled together under the bed, by those who had cleared the room. It was a trifling circumstance enough; but a slight one can divert the thoughts of those so little accustomed to the higher influences as was Mr. Gorhambury. He paused, and was restored at once to his old world of, as he thought, *realities*. After a moment, he stooped down to take up the paper. It was an opened letter upon which he first laid his hand. A canal report, or something of that nature: he let it fall. Then seeing that its appearance disfigured the solemnity of the apartment, he pushed it with his foot under the velvet valance. As he did so, he inadvertently struck out the end of

another folded paper. Oh! why — why? He never knew why: it was his fate—his destiny.

Every accident is fate, is destiny to the man who has not virtue and constancy of will enough to carve out his own. His fate, his destiny, impelled him to stoop—to draw out the fatal paper. It was the will.

Lord Aylmer, on that day when he lay dying, had, in his desire to set his house in perfect order before his departure, requested his wife to bring the will, that he might glance over it again. Satisfied with the examination, and wishing to make no change, he had laid it upon a table that stood by the head of his bed, and which was nearly covered with various papers and open letters. In the confusion and distress of the subsequent night, these papers had been disregarded. When the men came to arrange the coffin and the bed, the table had been carelessly removed: some of the papers had been carried with it into the next room; others had fallen upon the floor, and had been kicked by one of the

undertaker's men out of the way under the bed.

And thus the will got into Mr. Gorhambury's hands.

CHAPTER VI.

The prayer which had been rising to the frail man's lips died away, and with it every better aspiration which the view of the dead body of the young and beloved Lord Aylmer had excited. His thoughts, like a relaxed and unstrung bow recovering its natural form, flew back to the world, and to what he considered as its true realities, in a moment. The will! Yes—there was no doubt of it; it was the will of the late Lord Aylmer which he held in his hand, and with it consequences the most weighty and far-extending. His first thought was only that of sudden surprise at having discovered the

important document in this unexpected way, and his first impulse the honest and natural one, to call up the sleeping attendants from the other room, and immediately transmit the paper to Lady Aylmer.

The temptations of the devil may be compared to the insinuating of a wedge. A small, almost undiscernible breach is made in the integrity of a man's heart; gradually, and almost insensibly, the breach is widened, till the adversary, all successful, no longer keeps terms, but hammers and drives away, and the whole moral being is shivered into irretrievable ruin.

First, Mr. Gorhambury thought there was no immediate occasion for haste. He would himself deliver the will in the morning. It would be a gracious way of introducing himself to Lady Aylmer, whom he had not yet seen. Then the idea stole over his mind that it might be as well the will were not at present seen in his hand. One of the sleepers in the next room might awake—might now be awakened—might be watching him. He glanced at the open door with a suspicious, nervous eye; but there was

nothing to apprehend, as he thought, in that quarter. From the place where he sat he could discern no one; consequently, he argued that no one could see him. So he rose up, put the will within the breast of his coat, folded it closely over, and then, like a thief and a criminal, with a step stealthy as that of Macbeth when about to commit the murder, already guilty in thought, he stole out of the chamber of death, as completely a slave to the temptations of the present life, as if death were not—as if a future were not—as if judgment on unrighteous doers was not—and as if no lesson were to be read in the great mystery he had just before been contemplating with such emotion.

He got safely and unobserved into his own room, though his hand did tremble, and the snuffers and extinguisher rattled against his silver candlestick, making a noise that seemed to him almost startling in the dead silence of the hour. He got safely back, however; and shutting his door with the utmost caution, noiselessly drew the bolt. And then the first thing he did, with a strange feeling of terror, and as if some spectre was walking behind him,

was to look under the bed—to hold up the curtains—to peep behind the bed—under the drapery of the dressing-table—into every closet and corner—once over, twice over, still holding the will under the breast of his coat; and when he had thus, at last, satisfied himself that no living creature could by possibility be there, a prey to nervous terror, he still took one other precaution. He went and examined the key-hole, but the key was upon his side of the door; then he stooped down to see that the door fitted below, at the side, above. Then he again looked behind the window-curtains twice over; he looked to be certain that no one could be gliding behind them. At last he was satisfied that no mortal eye did behold him. He sat down with an air of relief and satisfaction, and after the pause of a few minutes, took out the fatal paper.

I shall not stop to turn your attention to the practical atheism of this man's behaviour. To be such an abject coward as regarded his fellow-creatures, and thus entirely insensible to other terrors, speaks for itself. Probably all criminals are atheists of the same description.

This man professed to believe, and believed he did believe, in a God; and yet, when he had locked his door, and twice looked under and behind the bed, and twice lifted every window-curtain, and twice examined every closet and corner, he sat down secure, as if there were no other eye in the universe, to perform deliberately a base and treacherous action.

Step by step we go on!

He knew he had no business even to keep possession of the will, for an hour, far less to examine its contents; but it might be of the greatest consequence to his interests to be made acquainted with these said contents, and there could be no great harm in just looking over it!

Touch not! taste not! handle not!

So he took it out from under the breast of his coat, and, as he did so, I wish you could have seen the man. Alone as he was, what a mean, despicable, hang-dog look he had! He held it a little while, his eyes fixed upon the superscription: "The last will and testament of Claribert, Lord Aylmer." The letters began to swim before his eyes, so intently he looked upon them. Then, his hand shaking so that

the whole paper shook, he slowly unfolded it, and began to read. He had not proceeded far before his hand became more steady. He found reason, as he thought, to be very glad that he *had* read it. His conscience might not be satisfied, but his understanding was. He had done a very wise thing, in straining a point to make himself acquainted with the enemy's position. The further he read, the more he congratulated himself upon having thus become master of the facts with which he should have to contend. The weight and importance of the intelligence thus obtained seemed, to his coarse perceptions of right and wrong, in some degree to justify the means.

In short, the perusal of the will informed him, that by it Lord Aylmer constituted Lady Aylmer sole guardian of his son, and sole executrix of his will. And, in consideration, as it was stated, of her very small settlement, bequeathed to her the sum of ten thousand pounds in money, and an annuity of two thousand a year charged upon the estate. The landed property was entailed, and came to the young Claribert as a matter of course. The whole of the re-

mainder of his possessions, with the above exception, and various legacies to his dependants, was left without limitation of any sort to his son, when he should come of age, until which time Lady Aylmer was to have the entire control over it, with power to apply any part, portion, or even the whole in any manner she should think best calculated to secure her son's interests.

It appeared, however, by the tenor of the will, that in case of failure of the direct heir, by the arrangements made by the old lord in his disapprobation of his son's choice, all this large personal property would, instead of being shared by the wife, devolve to the daughters; and, in case there were no daughters, follow the same course as the land, and go to the heir-at-law. So that, except under this will, Lady Aylmer could lay no claim to any portion of it.

The amount of the property as appeared by a schedule attached to the document, was such as perfectly to astound Mr. Gorhambury: so very greatly did it exceed his expectations. It appeared that the old lord had been a good

manager, and a saving, ambitious man; for besides this great personalty, considerable estates had been purchased by him, all of which, however, were strictly entailed. The sum left to Lady Aylmer, therefore, was all that the young lord could strictly call his own; but there was a right reserved upon some of the old family property to make a settlement upon a wife, and of this to its full extent Lord Aylmer had availed himself.

The will, therefore, placed in Lady Aylmer's hands at once, both the authority and the means to dispute the question as to the right of entry of the next heir.

True, Mr. Saxston seemed to hold out the hope that *a* body might be discovered, and the death of the child be proved; but how uncertain was such proof, and what endless questions might arise under this will!

Then the inheritance! What property! what power! what dignity! what heaps of untold wealth lay almost within his grasp! were his in all equity and right; and yet, by the powers given under the will, they might be disputed, and himself, after being ruined

with the contest, be worsted at last. Such are the uncertainties of the law, and such were the real difficulties of the question. Whereas, situated as she now was, helpless and almost penniless, how could she enter into an expensive litigation, and attempt to disturb him in the possession he had obtained?

He sat there, holding the will in his hand, and perusing and re-perusing its rather singular arrangements; and the more he perused it, and the longer he looked upon that golden schedule of property, which, to do him justice, he really did believe was rightfully his own (for of course he believed, what everybody but Lady Aylmer believed, that the child was drowned) the more forcible did those casuistical arguments appear to him which the demon within kept urging.

The reflection that finally settled the matter with him was this: he should inflict no injury upon Lady Aylmer. True, he had reason, he thought, to look upon her as his enemy; but what of that? He would act by her in the most strictly honourable and liberal manner. Probably she might be acquainted with the dis-

positions of the will. If so, he would insist upon fulfilling them to the letter, so far as her legacy and annuity were concerned.

It was just possible she might be ignorant of what her husband's intentions had been; in that case, still more faithfully would it become him to fulfil them, to act the liberal, the *generous* part.

Yes, he would conscientiously adhere to the intentions of the young Lord Aylmer. Not but what the allowance was very large for a woman brought up with the habits and expectations of the young Lady Aylmer. But what of that? he would not wrong her of a sixpence; no, not for worlds!

He sat there considering the matter over till he really began to look upon himself as a very generous—nay, as a rather ill-used man, to have so large an annuity to pay. But it should be paid without grudging—yes, every sixpence of it.

As for destroying the will, this was beginning to assume an aspect of an indifferent action—one imperiously demanded by the circumstances, and that could, by possibility, injure

no one — nay, must prove an advantage to every one concerned, Lady Aylmer herself included, as she would thus be spared the temptation, with the possibility, of running herself into a course of endless and expensive litigation.

Indeed, altogether, the matters were so excessively complicated by this absurd will, and her absurd obstinacy, that there really was no other rational course to pursue.

It was disagreeable—certainly, very disagreeable—but what could a man do? very hard upon him, to be placed, by the unreasonable conduct of others, and the intricate involvement of circumstances, in such a dilemma. There are occasions, however, in life, when a sensible man must be able to discard, to hold himself above minute scruples.

Should *he?*

He arose from his chair irresolute. He laid his hand upon his candle—lifted it up—looked round.

Suddenly, the fire, which had been heaped up for the night, fell in with a loud noise,

startling him, and making him tremble and turn pale.

Then it burst into a blaze again, illuminating the whole room. What a large fireplace it was; and what a heap of coal the housemaid had laid on.

The opportunity! now, or never!

If he kept the will in his possession, how dangerous! If he gave it up, how ruinous! What weakness! what folly! not to dare. And after all, what was there in it? Who would be hurt by it? She should have every farthing of her annuity: she should have more, he could afford it, she should have more. Three thousand a-year! four thousand! and one of the houses to live in, if she wished it! Everything to make her comfortable and happy.

And the blaze mounts up fiercely, for a thick paper has caught fire.

It blazes up so high, that it threatens to catch the chimney. A great heap of blazing soot comes tumbling down. Heavens and earth! the chimney is on fire!

No, no—all safe.

"What a fool I was!" and he takes the shovel and sweeps down what remains of the blazing soot; and it mingles with all that remains of the ashes of the lost will and testament of Claribert Lord Aylmer.

It was done. The soot and the ashes of the paper together, almost extinguished the fire.

He took his candle, and looked anxiously among the embers, to see whether any vestige of papers destroyed could be detected, when the ashes should be removed the next morning.

It seemed to him that there was a good deal of the ash of burnt paper, still to be traced mingled with the soot and ashes from the grate. And the fire seemed to be going out. He must light it up again. Some wood and abundance of coal ashes being lighted again, every remnant would be consumed.

Some wood! But where was he to get wood in order to renovate the fire?

"My kingdom for a horse!"

Oh, for wood!

There was wood in a large basket standing at the end of the corridor; but he dared not leave the room for his life. He trembled at the very idea.

Within the room with the door locked he felt safe; but he would not have stepped out of it at that moment, no, not to—to—win his soul back again.

So he went prowling about the chamber, opening one closet, or drawer, and another, but they were all empty.

At last, oh, mercy! in a remote corner of the closets, he found a few bundles of the wood used by housemaids for lighting fires, which in the obscurity he had overlooked.

Oh! did he not seize upon it with transport! and did he not lay it on the ashes, and light it, and heap up with coals! and make a great big blazing terrible fire, enough to consume every vestige of his iniquity!

And then, his hands black and defiled, but not so blackened and defiled as his heart; his face scorched, his temples throbbing, the masses

of his coarse black hair all tangled in disorder; he raised himself at last from his knees before the fire-place, and stood up—that tall dark man in black—and looked!

He was startled at himself, as he saw his whole figure thrown out by the fire which blazed furiously, and reflected in a long dressing-glass, which stood opposite.

However, there was nothing more to be done. Every trace of the recent action was effaced, so he went and washed his hands; and then he was alarmed at the blackness of the water, and he was afraid that this strange blackness might excite suspicion — look odd, at least. What should he do with it? It was some time before the simple expedient of emptying the basin out of the window suggested itself. At last he bethought himself of that, and went and opened the shutter with much caution.

"How is it with me, when even a noise appals me!"

He was much afraid lest any one should hear him undoing the shutter, at that strange hour of the night. However, he was managing to effect it without noise, when suddenly, the bar

fell with a dreadful clatter. He stopped—listened—his heart beating up into his throat, but all was quiet. He unclosed the casement, and then he looked out into the night—the still, holy night.

> "Oh, holy night, with what pure dignity
> Walk'st thou thy vigil through the stilly air."

There was no moon; but a slight frost had rendered the stars peculiarly brilliant, and there they shone forth in all their spangled hosts; glittering and shining over the wide cope of the universe! Telling of majesty, of vastness, of infinity!

And he stood a moment, awe-struck before the calm grandeur of the scene—of star-spread heaven above, and dim glimmering, wide-extended earth beneath. Awe-struck, and his heart rising and expanding—even *his* heart expanding, before the majestic silence. Even *his* heart! swelling to Him, the great author of all this mighty vision—Him! his God! Shall *he* find him? It was but the delusion of a moment. The thought of what he had done—of what he was—suddenly came over

him, and the miserable man sank down upon his knees, bent his head upon his low, outspread hands—miserable, miserable man—and wept. But sad feelings are soon exhausted. No blessing fell upon those tears, wrung from him by the sudden emotion of the moment: there was no true compunction, no availing penitence in them!

In a few seconds Mr. Gorhambury had risen again, had fetched his wash-hand basin, emptied it—carefully holding it far out, so that not a trace of his having done so should remain on window-sill or wall—and then he closed the window, and the shutters, and dropped the curtain, and left the holy and beautiful night to walk out her vigil alone. Whilst he, taking out his watch, and perceiving that by this time it was three in the morning, was seized with a fresh terror, lest anything should happen, and he should be found watching. So he cast off his clothes in a great hurry and hastened into his bed, and there he lay in a strange confusion of thought, half-asleep, half-awake, wearied and exhausted—his recollection be-

coming confused and dreamy, yet retaining the impression in every change of thought, that something or other terrible had happened, and that he was an altered man.

CHAPTER VII.

That night another man, still meaner and more contemptible, was busied upon the affairs of Mr. Gorhambury, or rather, upon his own.

Five thousand pounds! What an immense sum that appeared to his imagination! He would have bartered his soul for it. But he was not going to peril that article at all, as he thought. Mr. Saxston possessed a very accommodating conscience, and easily argued himself into the conviction, that the deceit he was resolved upon practising, was the most innocent little contrivance in the world—such as would benefit everybody concerned, and himself in particular.

So, after leaving the apartment in which he had been closeted with Mr. Gorhambury, he walked forthwith to the stables, and taking out his horse, mounted that most quiet of four-footed creatures, and took his way, pondering, as the animal fell into its usual jog-trot pace, upon the means of carrying his purposes into execution. Mr. Saxston had a cool, clear head of his own, and he soon arranged the business to his mind, and laid out his plan of proceedings.

The first object was to ascertain, by his own most careful personal search and examination, that the real body of the lost child was nowhere to be found; the second, that the reward offered by Lady Aylmer did not produce the astounding effect of causing the little boy to be brought forward alive. There seemed no possible conceivable reason, if the child were actually living—a matter that appeared quite incredible—why he should not already have been produced. Even before the offer of so large a reward, every one must have felt sure, from the well-known liberality of Lord and Lady Aylmer, that any one bringing their

lost son must be largely recompensed. Mr. Saxston, therefore, made himself pretty certain that nothing would result from Lady Aylmer's exertions, and that the child, alive or dead, would never appear again. The body, he made little doubt, had been swept by the torrents of that fatal night, far out to sea. If so heavy a corpse as that of the steward—and no one doubted for an instant that *he* had perished—could have been thus swept away, how much more might the remains of a little child, between three and four years old, be carried down? A few days would settle the matter as regarded the production of the living child. If he did not appear very soon, most certainly he would never appear more. It was necessary to Mr. Saxston's plan that four or five additional days should elapse before he discovered the body; he had, therefore, plenty of time before him.

The river in which the catastrophe had happened took its rise in the mountains, upon the skirts of which the large hereditary domain of the Aylmers lay; and after traversing a tract of desolate moorland, at times hidden by the almost impervious thickets which

clothed its banks, and now dashing between scarped precipices and forming cataracts over broken rocks, made its way to the large river, or rather estuary, which is seen upon the western side of our island. The torrent was, from the nature of its course, liable to great swells when heavy rain fell, or the snow melted upon the hills; but such a sudden rise as that which had taken place upon the fatal night in question had not been known within the memory of man. A water-spout, it was supposed—and, indeed, this proved to have been the case—had fallen in the mountains some little distance from its source, and had poured forth this sudden deluge of waters.

The evening was not yet closed, but the sun was sinking towards the west, when Mr. Saxston rode out of the stable-yard at Castle Avon. Heavy clouds hung over the western sky, and the short rays shed a yellow glory beneath, showing forth the varied outline of the peaked mountains; the lowlands being already darkened with shadow.

He turned his horse's head towards the desolate track, and pursued his way to the ford.

The first thing he did, when he arrived there, was to dismount, fasten his horse to a tree, and set about a most rigorous examination of the spot. He found that the tracks of the horse's feet, which had been seen the first night upon the steep, miry ascent, leading directly from the ford, had been all obliterated, or were so mixed with various others as no longer to be distinguished. Since the waters had subsided, the use of the ford had been resumed, and the country people had again betaken themselves to the old road, traversing this desolate track by the shorter way, which spared them so many miles.

At this moment, however, as he gazed upon the rocky bed of the river, broken into deep and dangerous pools—deep and dangerous even when the river was at the lowest—and full of broken rocks and stones ; and from thence, upon the long extent of brown undulating moorland, which lay at the foot of the frowning mountains beyond, nothing could be more intensely solitary than the scene. Not a single traveller could be descried upon the long line of road that lay stretched out before him—for this bank of the river was high, and commanded the other—

and not a sound broke the deep silence, save the cry of a hawk which was whirling its flight above his head, and the low twitter of some reed birds near the river's brink.

He felt almost appalled by this profound silence and solitude, and uneasy thoughts began to enter his head. He kept glaring frequently at the dark, choked-up thickets upon each side of him, almost expecting some wild and ferocious face to appear among the branches.

This part of the country had not, indeed, the best of characters. What between gipsies, smugglers, and footpads, people were not very fond of traversing it after nightfall. It was, however, quite light still, being nearly an hour before sunset; so Mr. Saxston endeavoured to shake off his lugubrious feelings, and to proceed in his search.

He first carefully examined the road; nothing was to be learned from that. Then he went down to the river's brink, and peeped about among the rocks and stones, equally in vain. Then he walked some little way over the rough and difficult ground which the flood had lately covered, and from which it had retired. And at last, wearied out with the fruitless

search, he returned to the place where he had left his horse.

He did not immediately mount, but kept peeping about the thicket, as if he expected to find something therein. At last, he espied the little winding, intricate path, to which I have adverted before, and made his way between the branches for a few paces; but it looked so dismal, so close, so dark, so impervious, so fitted for scenes of guilt, that he did not much like to go on. He was just turning back, when, between the brambles, as if thrust in to be out of sight, he thought he saw something like the end of a bludgeon.

He felt, for the moment, almost as much startled, and almost as nervous as Robinson Crusoe, when he beheld the foot-print on the sands, and was quite as much inclined to turn his back upon the apparition, and take to his heels; but he recovered himself in a second, and well aware of the importance of getting into his possession any facts relating to this important case, he took courage, turned round, and laying his hand upon the bludgeon—for bludgeon it was—drew it forth.

He felt sick and turned pale, when he had done so. The other end of the bludgeon was steeped in blood! His first sensation was horror, the next excessive fear. A murder had been committed upon this spot! He jumped to the conclusion at once.

He began to tremble exceedingly. His craven heart was perfectly upset by the idea of being even near the scene where some bloody deed had been perpetrated, and his first impulse was to fly. He fancied the villain to whom the bludgeon belonged would start out upon him from behind the thicket, and murder him for the discovery he had made. He had heard stories, not altogether without foundation, of the vindictiveness of the gipsies who haunted these wilds; how they had been known, even years and years after the event, in manners the most cruel and horrible, to revenge themselves upon any one who had been instrumental in detecting their crimes, and bringing them to justice.

He recollected a dreadful story of this description told to him when he was a little boy, and which had haunted his imagination for years; and he fancied himself already surrounded by

grinning gipsies, putting him to death with the most horrid tortures. He was, to tell the truth, frightened out of his wits: so what did he do, but push the bludgeon into the thicket again, and so effectually conceal it that not a vestige of it was to be seen; and then, fearing to look behind him, he mounted his horse, and rode as fast as he could home.

And the faster he rode, the more frightened he felt; till he fancied he heard the hoofs of a pursuer's horse behind him. But he durst not look back: he kept urging his poor steed onwards, with whip and spur; until at last the unfortunate beast, covered with foam, and the rider quite in a cold reek with terror, they stopped before Mr. Saxston's own house, at the end of the long straggling street of the little town of Avonmore. Oh! how his heart dilated, as the hoofs of the poor animal rang upon the pavement!

He got off his horse, threw his bridle to the great lubberly boy who officiated as groom; and entering his house, crept up to his bed.

Safely there he lay, and pondered upon what he had seen; and the result of his pondering

may be briefly summed up in a few words—he resolved to say nothing about it.

He began to suspect that Mr. Yates had met with some foul play, and had been murdered, and thrown, with the child, into the stream; unless his body had been carried off, and hidden in some of the holes and corners with which that region of mountain limestone abounded. And then he recollected with horror, that Mr. Yates had certainly exposed himself to the vengeance of the gipsies; for he had, not very long before, succeeded in carrying out against them an indictment for horse-stealing; had proved his point; and in consequence two men had been transported as accessories; and one man, under the severity of the then law, hanged.

Mr. Saxston had been present at the trial, and he now recalled—what had not at the time made any great impression — the savage scowl of a wretched black-eyed hag, whose face had been suddenly pushed out from amid the crowd, as sentence was pronounced, and then as suddenly withdrawn. He remarked the look she had cast upon Mr. Yates, as he sat in the witness-

box, with an air of satisfaction at this termination of the trial; and also the clenched fist, for an instant hastily raised and shook, as the eyes of the hag fell upon him.

These things, now so vividly recollected, added to his terror and consternation, and settled him in his resolution, never to breathe a word of what he had seen, or of his suspicions, to living being.

The next day, Mr. Saxston felt himself very poorly, and staid at home and dined upon broth; but a second night, passed in good sleep, served to dispel the dismal images of the previous one, and he rose up quite a changed man. All his nervous terrors dissipated like a dream; refreshed, and ready to pursue his plans, and pocket his five thousand pounds.

Five days and nights had now elapsed since the disappearance of the child: the body, if found, must be so swollen and disfigured with lying in the water, that in all probability it would not be recognisable. But then, how was it to be identified? By its dress, to be sure.

And he suddenly slapped his hand upon his

forehead, and exclaiming: "Fool! idiot that I am! not to have thought of that before," rang the bell violently, ordered his horse out, and without waiting to swallow a morsel or breakfast, forgetful of bludgeons and of gipsies' wives, rode as hard as he could to the ford, and crossed it; rejoicing that he had as yet met nobody, for the hour was so early that not a creature was upon the road: and so he went on, and never drew bridle till he arrived at the little mountain town where Mrs. Manvers, the widow of the late incumbent, and the mother of Lady Aylmer, lived.

Time and chance happen unto all, says the wise man; and chance seems to assist the nefarious designs of the evil-doer, as well as the best-intentioned plan of the philanthropist.

Mr. Saxston had his share of good luck upon this occasion. He happened to be acquainted with the young woman who was the little Claribert's nurse, and who was rather of a superior education, and likewise remarkably pretty.

Mr. Saxston had admired her exceedingly at church, and had now and then escorted her afterwards on her way to the Castle. He had

not as yet quite made up his mind whether he should so far condescend, as to offer her proposals of marriage; but the young woman, though prudent and reserved in her behaviour, had shown such an evident partiality for his company, that he had turned the matter over in his mind several times. And now, as good luck would have it, as he rode up the lane which led to Mrs. Manvers' house, feeling extremely anxious to speak with this nurse, and yet full of the absolute necessity of not being seen by any of the other servants, and casting about in his mind how he should bring this to bear, what should he see, but the well-known, somewhat coquette, cap of Mrs. Margery, peering over a hedge of sweet-briar which bordered the lane, and separated it from Mrs. Manvers' garden.

Mrs. Manvers inhabited a small cottage, prettily ornamented, and almost buried in thick ivy, cluster roses, and eglantine. It was situated at a short distance from the neighbouring little town, and was surrounded by a small, but very pretty garden, exquisitely kept in the prime taste of that day. This, with a small annuity, was all the mother could be persuaded

to accept from Lord Aylmer, when he married the beautiful daughter of a forlorn and needy widow. She had desired to remain where she had been born, and where she had lived and married, in her original obscurity, surrounded, as she said, by her own people. Her greatest pleasure on earth was to receive a visit from her little grandson; who was, she declared, and with truth, one of the most beautiful and remarkable children that ever was seen.

The young Claribert was, indeed, a most lovely, intelligent, and spirited child—bold, active, and independent. Digging in Mrs. Manvers' garden; riding her great house-dog; teazing the cat; hunting the kittens; rattling his carts unmercifully over her head; and screaming and laughing, in the raptures of his childish joy, till her ears tingled again. Alas! that this bright promise should have been so soon cut off! But who is equal to the understanding of these things?

Mrs. Manvers, who was now very infirm, and quite unable to travel, had been so heart-broken when the disastrous news reached her, that she had taken to her bed in all the powerless despair of a weak and aged person, totally

incapable of bearing up against her sorrow. She was a good and pious creature; and she had bowed her head, and said: "It is the Lord!" but she seemed altogether too feeble in body, to bear up against the weight of this overwhelming grief. She could only patiently yield under it, and take to her bed, unable even to rise; far less to afford any assistance to her daughter.

Lady Aylmer, in truth, had so long been accustomed to pet her mother, as a being to be supported and assisted, rather than to afford support herself, that the idea of seeking aid from her in this dreadful passage of her life never suggested itself. She was almost relieved to hear that Mrs. Manvers was in her bed; but too much occupied with her own racking anxieties, and the dreadful impediment offered to free action by the seizure on her limbs, to think very much of anything but the lost child; she contented herself, with desiring Margaret to remain, and nurse Mrs. Manvers; thinking that the company of this young woman, who was rather above the common sort, might be some comfort to her mother. So Mrs. Margery was still at Woodbine Cottage, as Mrs. Manvers' abode, was, I am sorry to say, named.

Now, it happened that Mrs. Margery had been a good deal fatigued by the watching of the night before, Mrs. Manvers having been more than usually restless. It was a lovely autumn morning; and autumn though it was the flower-garden, with its china-asters, china roses, and various shrubs, fading into all sorts of yellows and crimsons, looked very tempting; so she had stepped out, and was strolling by the sweetbriar hedge when Mr. Saxston espied her.

Mrs. Margery heard a horse coming up the lane, and looked over the hedge and saw him; on which, the colour flew into her face, and she gave a little shriek of recognition. He took no notice, however, until he had looked up the lane and down the lane, and raised himself upon his stirrups, and peered over the neatly-cut hedge into the garden, and satisfied himself that there was nobody near, and then, he said:

"Good morning, Miss Margaret; and fortunate I think myself to find you out walking this lovely September morning, which — but you don't love flattery, and I will say no more. Is there a gate to the garden near here?"

"A few paces farther down," she answered; "but I beg you to excuse me, I dare not ask you to walk in. Mrs. Manvers is the most particular old lady in the born world."

"I was not wishing to come in, Miss Margaret, rather very particularly the contrary; but, what I wish, and what I come for, is, just three minutes *tête-à-tête* conversation with your dear self, which if you will grant me, we can walk down the lane together; I hanging my horse's bridle over my arm; for, indeed, I have something of the most serious importance to impart to you."

Mrs. Margery bridled and coloured; and looked this way and that; but turned and walked on towards the gate, which she opened without making the least noise, and the two were walking in the lane together.

He chose the way by which he had come, which he knew was quite solitary; and throwing his horse's bridle over one arm, and offering her the other; which she took, whilst he gently strained the hand he held to his breast, he said:

"Miss Margaret, awful events have passed

since we parted; but I hope they have not driven me out of your memory."

"Awful indeed!" she said; and she knew it was her cue to weep, so she put her handkerchief to her eye, and said: "The sweet—sweet babe!"

"Yes, poor little creature! there is an end of him and of poor Mr. Yates—both drowned; swept away into the Bristol Channel, and not the slightest trace of either of them to be discovered anywhere."

"So I heard. I assure you, Mr. Saxston, I have cried about it till my head was ready to split at times; and as for his poor grandmama, I think it will be the death of her, for she has never held up her head since."

"It is a very awful business. But now, Miss Margaret, I have something very particular to impart to you, relating to this matter. The body of neither Yates nor the poor little fellow have yet been found; but I know one who would give five thousand pounds if he could produce evidence of the child's decease, or find the body. Now, I hope the body may be found, for, the next heir being a very great

friend of mine, would prove a very powerful one in due course, if he succeeded to the inheritance, I doubt not; he it is will give five thousand pounds to the fortunate person, who might succeed in discovering the poor boy's remains. It is so long, however, since—the time of his disappearance being now nearly a week—that the poor little corpse might be too much changed to be easily identified. Pray, how was he dressed when he left you?"

"Oh, poor little thing! I put him on his warmest clothes; for I said to myself, surely it's going to be a wet night, the clouds were drawing up so. You never saw the like. I would not have had him go, poor lamb! but Mr. Yates told me my poor lord was a dying, and must see the child; and my lady would have it—so what could I do? and the dear boy himself, as soon as he heard his papa was ill, and wanted to see him, would take no refusal, but was in such a hurry to be off! I think I see him now, with his beautiful flaxen curls hanging over his sweet lily-white neck and shoulders, and his large blue eyes fixed upon his grandmama, begging to go, almost crying to do so. He was such a sensible, loving

creature; I think there never was so forward and clever, or so sweet and affectionate a child of his age before."

And here Mrs. Margery really did feel some honest, unaffected tears swelling to her eyes.

"Well—well," said Mr. Saxston, rather impatiently; "and so what had he on?"

"Why, he had on his little every-day dress of tartan; and I was for changing it, knowing as how my lady loved to see him dressed out, especially when he was to go to his papa; and I said to Mrs. Manvers—"

"Pray tell me at once, what the child wore when he went away."

Mrs. Margery looked up with an expression of mingled wonder and displeasure at this abruptness, and seemed very much inclined to be offended; which Mr. Saxston observing, he assumed the humblest air of contrition, and added:

"If you knew how very pressing this business is—how short my time, and the importance of any information you could give, not only to my own interests as regards money, but to interests far nearer to my heart; you would forgive my ill-breeding,

indeed you would. May I beg Miss Margaret to tell me what the child wore, as succinctly as she can?"

There was something in Mr. Saxston's manner, that more than ever convinced Miss Margaret, that she had an interest in the number of thousands of pounds, that Mr. Saxston might possess; so checking her natural inclination to prate, she answered, for once, to the point.

"He had on his tartan frock, and over that a warm pelisse-coat of blue cloth, embroidered with braid, of my lady's own working; and a felt hat, with a grey feather and blue ribbons."

"And his gloves?"

"Yes, a pair of odd, old-fashioned gloves, worked in blue, of my lady's own work, which he was so proud and fond of, that he insisted upon having them on, whenever he was dressed to go out."

Mr. Saxston having moved on a little, said:

"Did Mrs. Manvers, or any of the servants, see how he was dressed when he went away?"

"Well, I don't much think they did. For Mrs. Manvers had kissed and taken leave of

him before he had his coat and hat on; and then Mr. Yates was in such a hurry to be gone, that I scuttled him down-stairs, and popped him on the horse myself. No, I don't think, as it happened, that any of the servants saw him after he was dressed. Mrs. Manvers keeps only two maids, you know."

"You don't happen to have any more clothes of the same sort, belonging to the young gentleman, by you?"

"No, I have only his best black velvet coatee and his white frocks. Plenty of them, for his mamma and Mrs. Manvers, all summer-time could bear him in nothing but his white frocks; and for sure, he looked, for all the world, like a little angel in them."

"Humph! haven't got another pelisse or great coat?"

"No; oh yes! there is his common blue garden coat, what they were used to put him on, when the weather was cold. I had it with me; but as he had never worn it since we came, I forgot that, or it would have been the fitterer for such a journey with that Mr. Yates."

Again Mr. Saxston bent down his head, as if in deep thought; yet, meditative as he

seemed, he did not the less keep advancing down the lane, and drawing his companion with him. The lane led to some rough, solitary fields, and the banks and hedges upon either side were so high, that it was completely screened from observation.

When they had arrived at a most secluded spot, where the narrow lane passed between two almost precipitous banks, covered with brushwood, and nearly hidden from the sky by the bushes which shot athwart it, Mr. Saxston stopped suddenly; and turning to his companion, said:

"Time is precious; and delay may be fatal to everything. Answer me a plain question. Will you assist me to gain five thousand pounds, on condition that I make you Mrs. Saxston?"

"Oh la!—" she was beginning to colour, bridle, and make a fuss.

"Silence!" he said, with as much stern authority as if he had been her husband for ten years; "listen to my conditions. You must fetch me what I want, in the first place; afterwards you must consent to go with me where I will take you, and where we will be

married. But you must consent to live at that place, till I think it wise to bring you to my home. Many foolish young folks have made secret marriages before now to the *ruin* of their prospects. Will you consent to such for the *making* of yours and mine?"

"La, dear! only think—"

"Only think of one thing, Margaret. Will you, or will you not?"

He had a weak, tiresome, silly woman to deal with. It was some time before he could bring her to reason; but the object before him was too great, and he of too determined a character, to suffer himself to be baffled even by the silliest of silly women—creatures of all created beings the most tiresome and intractable to deal with.

Partly by blandishments, and partly by scolding, he at last brought the nurse-maid to the point he wanted. She promised to return to the house, take out a complete suit of the child's linen, a white frock, and the blue coat she had spoken of, and accompany Mr. Saxston wherever he would; which purpose she easily accomplished without being observed; for Mrs. Manvers was accustomed to lie till about ten

o'clock, undisturbed, and then to have her breakfast. The two maids were busy at their various occupations. It was not till ten o'clock, therefore, that Mrs. Margery was missed.

She was then not to be found. Neither in her room nor in the garden was she, nor in the lane, up which the cook ran, thinking that she might, as she sometimes did, have lounged out of the way.

CHAPTER VIII.

In what a state had the poor mother passed this time! Of all agonies, the horror of heart-suspense is perhaps the most hard to bear; and what a suspense was hers!

It was not the alternative between death on the one hand, and security on the other, like the harassing uncertainty of those who wait in terror for tidings of a ship which has not arrived at the time expected. One comfort, at least, the poor beating heart cannot be deprived of in that case —either the loved one is safe, or he is dead. Either way the hope is complete, or the extent of the misery is known. Oh! woe indeed,

when to be assured of the death of a beloved one, would almost be a relief.

At first Lady Aylmer had not felt the anguish of this view of the subject. She believed that her child lived, and believing so, that he would certainly be recovered; but, as she lay imprisoned upon that bed of pain, to which the contractions of her limbs condemned her, more fearful visions took possession of her mind. She still felt the most undoubted conviction that the child had not perished in the water.

But what then had become of him? Had he wandered away, poor little thing, and died miserably by inches of cold and starvation in the bushes? Or, had he—she had heard of such things, all sorts of tales about gipsies were current in that part of the country—had he been stolen away by some of those vagrant tribes, with which common report, peopled the solitudes of moors and mountains; and in that case, what would be his fate? She fancied the loving, clever child, almost preternaturally forward in intellect and affections, vainly calling to his father and his mother with those piercing shrieks of woe, which she had heard him once or twice

utter, when they two had been parted. His distress, the day she was forced to separate from him, and leave him with Mrs. Manvers still haunted her.

What must the poor little creature's agonies be now? And yet the hope that he lived was still sweet. She thought of the large reward she had offered, and felt it to be impossible that she should not recover him.

In such alternations, and racked by impatience to be well, to be able at this eventful period of her life to leave her bed, and see and act for herself in so dreadful an emergency, the heavy hours passed away. She had not yet seen Mr. Gorhambury. She felt an invincible repugnance to meeting a man always disliked by her husband, and by her husband's father, and who had, as she thought, thrust himself in a very indelicate manner upon her hospitality, at a moment when it was so evident she must wish to be alone. She was almost reconciled to her illness, when she recollected that it spared her from the necessity of enduring a presence, at that time so more than ever odious.

As for her grief at the loss of her husband, that, in the distraction of her mind, might be called almost a sweet feeling, when compared with others. So assailed and torn as she was by terror and anxiety, it was almost consoling to reflect that he had escaped; that he slept quietly where neither pain nor sorrow should reach him more; nay, better far perhaps, was even now rejoicing in those regions of celestial joy for which his spirit was fitted, watching over, and shedding a softening balm upon the lacerations of her spirit, by influences vague, yet most benign.

She had insisted upon being carried into his room, to take a last farewell of all that remained of him on earth; had kissed the marble cheek with many tears—tears which poured so fast and warm, they seemed to comfort her desolated heart. And then she had retired to her bed, to struggle with her anxiety, and endeavour to calm and compose her spirits, by resignation to the Divine will, even in this agonising hour.

So the days passed on till the funeral of Lord Aylmer took place; after which, she concluded

that of course Mr. Gorhambury would leave the Castle, she being resolved to send him no invitation to remain.

She was a creature of instincts and impulses —more, perhaps, than she ought to have been, poor thing!—and her antipathy to Mr. Gorhambury was so great, that she felt that it would be quite a relief to know that he was gone away again.

What was her surprise then, the morning after the funeral, not only to learn that Mr. Gorhambury still remained at the Castle, but to discover, that he was assuming an authority over its inmates, which could only be justified by his possessing the rights of ownership? She was startled at the intelligence; but when the first surprise was over, she began to reflect, and things presented themselves to her mind very disagreeably.

Could it be possible, that he was intending to claim the inheritance, before the death of her son was ascertained? To her, who felt so certain that the child had not perished, this appeared an act of the most unheard-of greediness and injustice.

But what should she be able to do? Sup-

posing he did put in his claim, what would the law decide? Yet so, early! Before even all possible means had been exhausted to search out the boy!

Oh! she felt that she must lie in bed no longer. If she died for it, she must be up and doing.

"I must get up, Mary; indeed, I must," she said to her maid. "Get me up and dress me. If I cannot stand, I will be supported; if I cannot walk, I will be lifted. I must lie in my bed no longer. Get me up; dress me any how. I must see and speak to Mr. Gorhambury."

"What dress? Ah, my lady!"

"What dress? My mourning weeds, to be sure. You do not think I am afraid of my black suit. Oh, Mary! Mary! when the heart is in thickest night, little matters it what we wear!"

They got her up, but under agonies of pain so great, that she could scarcely forbear from shrieking when she moved a limb; yet she was resolute. They got her to the sofa in her sleeping-room, and there she

sent to request an interview with Mr. Gorhambury.

She was kept waiting a little time before he appeared.

Beautiful, pale creature! there she lay, entirely covered with black, her lovely form hidden in a sort of cloud of crape and sables; her face only visible in a setting of white, and her hands like statuary marble, lay folded before her.

Beautiful and strange she looked! for her lips were almost as colourless and deathlike as her cheeks; and only two large eyes, still ardent and brilliant, seemed to give evidence of the life within her! So she appeared; those large eyes fixed impatiently upon the door, as it at last slowly and solemnly opened, and disclosed the tall, spectral figure of Mr. Gorhambury, clothed, like herself, in deepest mourning, and with his sallow cheek almost as pale as her own. He was a man, as I think I have said, of ill-built frame, large clumsy joints, and ungraceful, uncomely appearance; his face, from the harshness of its outline, the size of the features, and the hard coldness of his eye, singularly displeasing.

Most people he in some degree terrified as well as displeased; but Lady Aylmer was not one to be terrified by those she did not love. She had no fear of the face of man, except when that of the one she loved was clouded with displeasure. *That* she feared beyond words. She was very, very ill; faint and sick at heart, and feeble and in pain; but her high spirit deserted her not—it was aroused to its full powers by what threatened the interests of her son.

"Good morning Mr. Gorhambury," she said, with a sort of stately courtesy, as he entered the room, and started, and turned still paler, as he beheld the strange, but beautiful figure of Lady Aylmer. "I have to beg your pardon that I have played the part of hostess so ill; but my sickness and my great sorrow will plead my excuse. I should have been very sorry — deeply grieved—very much — "

"I beg Lady Aylmer will make no apologies to me," he said, in a confused, hesitating tone, a thing new in him; but her great beauty, together with the knowledge of the wrong that he had done her, appalled him. She was surprised at this appearance of timidity and irresolution in

his manner. She had been accustomed to think of him as of a man little given to that sort of infirmity; and the observation of it in some degree softened her feelings; so, abating a little of the lofty coldness of her manner, she went on:

"I ought, I know, to express my obligations to Mr. Gorhambury for so speedily visiting the Castle of his kinsman at such a mournful time as this. It was, no doubt, kindly intended, to honour by his presence the funeral of one whom all men reverenced and esteemed. I thank him for it; and I would, at any other time, beg of him to postpone his departure, and give me the honour of his company for a few days; but—but—he must excuse me; I cannot—no, I cannot."

Mr. Gorhambury seemed not to know exactly what answer to make to this speech; yet it could not pass unanswered. It brought the matter at once to a point between them, courteous as were the phrases in which its meaning might be couched. She had intended it so. She was too sore, too harassed, too excited, to brook delay. She felt that she must at

once be satisfied, as to his intentions and his claims.

"I am sorry; at another time, I hope, more hospitality—"

"Madam!"

The answer, brief as it was, aided by the tone and look which accompanied it, at once conveyed what it was intended to convey. She answered his look with one as expressive.

"I consider myself, as guardian of my son, to be the mistress of this house during his minority," she said, haughtily, raising herself up from her pillow as she spoke, supporting herself upon one arm, and turning that pale face and those lustrous eyes towards him.

"Guardian of your son!"

This look was intended now to express astonishment at her audacity, mingled with pity.

"My son is alive, Sir!"

He shook his head.

"He *is* alive, Sir! I am certain of it."

A half-contemptuous smile was suffered to steal to his lips, as he answered:

"Our wishes are evidence to no one but ourselves."

"I know it, Sir. Neither will wishes, on the other hand, prove that of which there is no evidence. Produce your proofs. I know my son came to land. There is his glove!" she cried, plucking the little relic from her bosom, and holding it up in a sort of wild triumph; "his glove! dropped from his little, precious, hand; and the glove was *dry*. It had been dropped *after* the child landed. He *did* land —he lives! he is safe! But, oh, my darling! my darling! where are you?"

"And upon such evidence," said Gorhambury, coldly, "is a man to be kept for years —for your life—for his own—may be, for ever —from his just inheritance? Futile attempt!"

"We shall see that," she said, her eyes sparkling with animation. "In the meantime, as that child's guardian, and entitled by my husband's will, *which I have seen*, to exercise the right, I take leave to consider myself as mistress of this Castle, to bid and forbid here as I think proper; and it pains me to begin by a gross breach of hospitality. But under the

circumstances, I will defer the pleasure of receiving Mr. Gorhambury till a more expedient time."

"And I, Madam, take leave, under the circumstances, to say, that it is Mr. Gorhambury's intention to remain in this Castle, as its rightful owner, unless the child of Lord Aylmer can be produced to negative his claim."

"Oh, he will be produced! he will be produced! Don't fear but he will be produced. I have got to my sofa—I shall soon be on my horse; and England and Wales, and the whole empire, ay, and the world, shall be searched, and I shall find my child. Make sure of that, Sir! In the meantime, under Lord Aylmer's will, of which I know, in his great and generous confidence, he constituted me sole executrix, I shall at least exercise the rights of an executrix over his property, and—"

"No will, can give any one a claim to interfere between me and the property entailed upon me, as next heir in blood."

"No doubt, if you were the heir; but

we shall see that. In the meantime," and she laid her hand upon the bell.

A footman appeared.

"Send Willmore to me."

The old man came in.

"Willmore, there lies a thickly-folded paper —your late honoured master's will, in short— upon the table which stood by his bedside. Bring it to me. It is sealed up in an envelope of white foolscap paper, and endorsed upon the back. I want it."

Mr. Gorhambury now rose from the chair he had taken near the sofa; and going to the other end of the room applied himself, whilst apparently waiting for the appearance of the papers, to the examination of a basket of greenhouse plants, which stood near one of the windows. After that, he approached a table at some distance, and began to look over some books of prints, that lay there. The time seemed very long; the lady became impatient. She rang the bell rather sharply. Her maid appeared.

"What can Willmore be about? Tell him to come to me."

"What can you have been about, Willmore?" as the old man entered the room. "It lies upon the little inlaid table which stood by the bedside."

"Madam, the table has been removed; and I can find no such paper as you describe, anywhere."

"Who removed the table?" starting up, as if to go and search for the will herself. "Alas!" she screamed, and fell back again.

Oh! nightmare dream! Worse! horrid, horrid fetters of the body!

"Who moved the table? Who dared to move the table?"

Her hand was on the bell again, and it was pulled violently. Mary again appeared.

"Send Mrs. Hislop" (the housekeeper).

"Oh, Mrs. Hislop! Mrs. Hislop! who was it went, and—and—arranged your dear master's room? There was a table by the bedside; and upon it was laid the will. Oh me! that I never thought of it before! How careless! And Willmore cannot find the will. The housemaid must have mislaid it. For Heaven's sake! dear woman, go and inquire, make it out, find it, and bring it to me."

"Oh, my God! my God!" she cried, passionately, "what will become of me? Who will be guardian to my son? That man—that man? Oh, pity! pity! pity!—never!"

Mr. Gorhambury, upon hearing this last burst of vehement feeling, found it impossible any longer to preserve his attitude of affected indifference. It was necessary to come forwards, to say something, to do something. To preserve the appearance of indifference, which he at first had assumed, would be almost as suspicious as anything he could do.

He had been making great efforts with himself to command his nerves, whilst he had pretended to be occupied with the plants, and to still the tumultuous beating of his heart, and keep, if possible, the blood from rushing to his cheeks and temples. He had succeeded but ill; and there was a deep-red suffusion over his face, like the sullen glow of a stormy sky seen under a heavy cloud, as he turned and approached the sofa where Lady Aylmer lay.

She could not conceal her dislike and fear at that moment. She gazed upon him with eyes but too expressive of both. He felt

nearly all that her looks conveyed; and feelings of rage and revenge were rising bitterly in his heart, as he looked at her, mingled with a bad exultation at the certainty that she was in his power.

He seemed to lose that sense of his shameful crime, which had so oppressed him a few moments before, in the resentment which her distrust and dislike engendered. He was able, therefore, to speak with less agitation than he had thought possible, as, with an appearance of suppressed indignation, partly real and partly affected, he said:

"I am at a loss to conceive, what I may have done to merit Lady Aylmer's aversion and distrust to the degree she is pleased to express."

"Done! Oh, no!—it is not you; I beg your pardon. What did I say? My child! my poor, poor child!"

And she burst into tears, and lay weeping unrestrainedly for some time. It was the first regular fit of weeping in which she had indulged since the death of her husband and the loss of her boy, and she did not endeavour to restrain it, but lay there, yielding to her

sorrow, to the desolation of her love, and to the idea, ever present, of her child not drowned, but living—the victim of oppression and wrong; for, whether rightly or not, she considered the claim of Mr. Gorhambury as a usurpation of her son's inheritance; and, whether rightly or not, felt an instinctive certainty that there would be little scruple, as to the means used to secure it.

Her suspicions were so strong, her distrust of his honour and good faith so unaccountable, her terrors so almost wild, that she began to tremble for her own reason. Little aware was she how nearly her suspicions approached the truth, when they extended to a doubt whether Mr. Gorhambury, some way or other, were not concerned in the disappearance of the will. But he allowed her to shed a torrent of tears, whose abundance, as they always do upon a nervous temperament like hers, softened and refreshed her, and quieting the terrible excitement of her mind, she felt in a great measure restored to herself—to that self, so full of clear perception, just reasoning, and generous courage.

As her spirits became tranquillised, her sense

of the situation in which she stood was sharpened, and the necessity for calmness and self-possession seemed more imperative than ever. So she conquered her hysterical emotion, and raising her head from the pillow, looked steadily into Mr. Gorhambury's face, as if she would have read his soul. He had continued standing there before her, as if fascinated to the spot, watching her as she wept. When thus she fixed her eyes upon him, he felt his colour change.

"The will, I begin to fear, will not be found," she said at last, as steadily as she could. "Can you tell me what will be my position, should this prove to be the case?"

"Your position shall be, as nearly as *possible*," he answered with emphasis, and as if relieved, for he felt very much relieved by the question—"as nearly as possible, that which it would have been had the will been found; at least, so far as it shall be in my power to make it so."

"My position—my own pecuniary position, perhaps, you mean. I thank you, Sir, for your kind intentions," she went on, with rather a haughty bend of the head, "but I was not adverting to that. I was thinking of my posi-

tion as regarded my child. By that will, Mr. Gorhambury, I was constituted his guardian."

"Why *will* you, Lady Aylmer, afflict yourself and me with suppositions so — allow me to say it—so irrational? Why will you persist in indulging hopes, equally injurious to my just claims, and your own restoration to tranquillity? What has been—has been—the past cannot be restored, nor the dead recalled to life, struggle and resist as we may. Why will Lady Aylmer so obstinately refuse to acquiesce in the truth?"

"Only, let Lady Aylmer be assured that such *is* the truth, and she will find submission and acquiescence, doubt it not, Sir," she said boldly; "but *that* is precisely what I must be assured of. I repeat it, I do *not* believe the child has perished."

"What would convince you of it?"

"When I see my baby: then I will believe it, and not till then," she said, and her voice faltered. "Alive or dead, let me see him again, and then, and not till then, I shall be satisfied. And then, and not till then," she went on with increasing energy, "shall I be convinced that

you have a title to my boy's inheritance; and we must try, Sir, if necessary, whether the law be of the same opinion or not."

"No doubt," he said, "the law will be satisfied."

He appeared, as she thought, very well contented with this reference. She asked, hastily:

"Have you any evidence which has not reached me?"

"Not as yet," he replied; but added, "that the time was short, and the body might yet be found."

"And, identified?"

"And, identified."

And so saying he went away, with the words: "I will see Lady Aylmer again when there is anything new to communicate."

Three days after this Mr. Gorhambury asked to see Lady Aylmer again.

His stern and dark countenance was more than usually dark and lowering, when Mr. Gorhambury appeared once more in Lady Aylmer's dressing-room. She was still lying

upon the sofa, a helpless cripple, but gradually recovering the use of her limbs, and as it was hoped, her health. He sent up to request an interview, saying that he had matter of importance to communicate. An involuntary shudder passed over her as she received the message. There was but one matter of importance which could bring him into her presence again so soon. Her heart began to beat violently. She pressed her hands tightly over it, and sat half-raised, looking anxiously at the door. It opened, and the tall man, with his strangely hard but now fearful countenance, appeared. He held a small parcel of folded writing paper in his hand.

"You are come again," was all she could utter, for she was almost breathless.

He made no answer, but walking up to the sofa, put the folded paper into her hand. She opened it, and shrieked aloud:

"He has been found!"

And the paper and a lock of flaxen hair fell from her hand to the floor.

"Yes," said Mr. Gorhambury, gravely, "the body has been found."

"Oh, where? how? when? my boy!

my little boy! oh, my child! my child! let me see him. You are restored, then, my baby! but how!—let me see him! let me kiss his little cheek once more, fold his pretty hand in mine! Oh, Sir! have me carried where he is; let me see him at least! my boy! my darling boy!"

It seemed as if the certainty that she should see him again, even though dead, softened the anguish of this extinction of her hopes. To have one thus lost, again, even in any way restored, was a consolation.

"Let me see him. Where is he? where is he?"

"My dear Lady Aylmer," began Mr. Gorhambury in a faltering voice, for his heart—even *his* heart—was touched, and his bosom was heaving with unusual emotion. "Pray, do not run on in this way. Recollect, my dear lady, that it is now nearly a fortnight since the poor little boy was lost. Indeed, you must not ask to see him. I brought you this hair, and his clothes, though much discoloured by the water; it may perhaps be a poor consolation to you, to see them. I hope you will not ask for more."

"But I do, and I shall—" she said, again the prey to vague, unaccountable suspicions.

"If you insist—certainly. But I warn you that there will be no satisfaction in the sight; the water, the exposure to the elements, corruption, has done its work. But for its dress, the body could not have been identified. But, upon this subject, I have taken all the precaution you or any one could desire. The clothes were taken off, before proper witnesses—namely, the clergyman of the parish, Mr. Saxston, your old servant Willmore, and your housekeeper. Still, I would wish you to have every assurance; but I believe when you have talked with these people, you *will* be satisfied."

All this was said with considerable effort, and as if he were forcing himself to speak. She mused a little, and then she said:

"Pray send Mrs. Hislop to me. Tell her to bring the clothes."

"Certainly I will, and I hope—" and he left the room, muttering something about satisfaction, which was not very intelligible.

In a short time Mrs. Hislop appeared. The

good woman's eyes were red with weeping, and it was as much as she could do to help bursting out crying again, when she saw her lady. She entered, carrying a little frock and coat and child's linen in her hand; they were quite discoloured with the wet and the sun. The good woman kept looking at them and weeping, whilst she gave them to Lady Aylmer. The mother seized upon the relics with a sort of hungry impatience. Hastily she looked them over. Alas! she knew them but too well. The little muslin frock all decked with lace and embroidery by her own hand; the tiny shirt, the stays, and petticoat, too well remembered; above all, the blue pelisse, in which he had so often played about. She kept looking them over and over: sometimes she kissed them; sometimes she pressed them to her heart and to her eyes.

"And you saw them taken off!" at last she said. "Ah, Hislop! my poor child. Where is he now?"

"We have clothed him in one of his own long night-gowns. He had been already placed in a shell when he came here, poor little love! But Mr. Saxston would not suffer him to be touched,

or anything more done, till he was brought here, poor thing! Mr. Gorhambury insisted upon Mr. Peters and Mr. Saxston being present whilst I took the things off. I did it, my lady, with my own hands. But, oh dear me! so changed! I would not—I could not have you see him, my dear lady, for all the world."

"I wish to see him, and I must see him. I cannot rest without I do. I must kiss his little hand, his little cheek. Ah, Hislop! Hislop!"

"His hand! his cheeks! No, my dear lady," said the good housekeeper, gravely. "You must kiss them again in heaven; they are dust and ashes now."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, my lady, to tell you the truth at once, the identity being ascertained, without a doubt, by the clothes, and proper attestations having been made, Mr. Gorhambury, seeing the sad state of the poor little remains, thought it best that the coffin should be closed. It has been soldered up. Indeed, indeed, my lady, believe me, he did right—we did right; it was necessary."

"You did greatly—greatly wrong. How come I to be the last to be informed that my child was found? How come you, my servants—Mr. Peters—to lend yourselves to conduct like this? Not even the choice offered me—not even the opportunity of satisfying myself—"

"Dear, my lady! this happened in the night, or so early this morning, that you were asleep; and all the gentlemen, and Mr. Peters more particularly, agreed that you had better not be disturbed."

"Fools!" was the indignant exclamation. "Pick me up that lock of hair, which has fallen down. Is this a lock of my child's hair?" she said, looking at it with suspicion. "My child's hair was more golden than this."

"Dear, my lady! you forget how long it has lain drenched in the water."

"This is not like thy hair, my child!" she kept repeating. "The garments are thine, and I can press them to my heart. This hair is a stranger to it. I *will* see the body!"

"Dear, dear, my lady! don't, don't think of it. Mr. Peters, all of them say—"

"Silence, Hislop! I *will* see the body!"

It was in vain to remonstrate. She was determined; and there was no one who, in this respect, could pretend to have the right to control her.

In vain Mr. Gorhambury, Mr. Peters, her servants, pleaded and assured her of the uselessness of the proceeding, of the sad changes which had taken place having rendered it impossible to recognise the child, except by the clothes and the hair. But she was obstinate, and they were forced to yield.

With infinite vexation, Mr. Gorhambury saw that covering removed, which he had hoped had sealed the transaction in silence for ever. He stood at the door of Lady Aylmer's room, listening in breathless anxiety to what would come next.

The door was left open, as the servants carried the mournful little coffin in; and what was his start of horror at the first exclamation of Lady Aylmer, "This is not the body of my child!"

The corpse was, however, so completely changed, so swelled by the water, and defaced by the influences of sun and air, that no one could wonder that she did not recognise it. The servants stood by gazing and shedding compassionate tears, but the mother's eyes were dry.

"This is not my child!" she kept repeating. Mr. Gorhambury could bear it no longer; he came into the room.

"What can you intend," he said harshly, "by the repetition of this wild assertion? Only one thing, it is plain, to keep me out of—and yourself in—possession of the late Lord Aylmer's entailed property, now mine. What am I to understand by this obstinate and—I would not be severe—*interested* incredulity?"

"Give it what name you please, Sir—obstinate or interested, it is indifferent to me. This is not the body of my child."

"Dear, my lady, you are raving, and— The clothes, and the hair!" put in Hislop, sadly.

"The hair is not his hair; but the clothes are his clothes. And you all say this poor drowned child was clothed in them. And you, Hislop, say you took them off; and you,

Willmore, and Mr. Peters, saw them taken off; but, I repeat it, this is not the body of my child. Take the poor thing away, and bury it where you will; by my dear Lord Aylmer, no doubt; but that is not his child."

The attendants looked at each other significantly.

"Poor thing! poor thing!" muttered Mr. Gorhambury.

"Do not speak so of me. Do not look significantly at me. Do not, Sir, pretend to suspect that my wits are failing me; you *know* they are not," she said, almost fiercely. "Take the inheritance if you will: the law, I suppose, will give it you now; but," looking steadily in his face, "you know best, whether you are not despoiling the widow and the orphan."

CHAPTER IX.

It was, in truth, a case that would not admit of a legal question. The best professional advice upon the subject was taken by Lady Aylmer, but the matter would not admit of a doubt. The opinions were unanimous, and indeed were delivered in a manner which gave Lady Aylmer the very painful impression that her perseverance was attributed either to very selfish and improper motives, or to a mind unsettled by misfortune. The matter was therefore dropped. Lady Aylmer took her departure from the Castle, and surrendered possession to Mr. Gorhambury. She retired upon the slender provision of three hundred a-year, which was all she took by her

settlement; the settlement having, in truth, been intended by the old lord rather to bar her dower, than for any other purpose.

Mr. Gorhambury used every persuasion in vain to induce her to accept an annuity from his hands. The amount of this annuity had, indeed, as he reflected upon the subject (the first desire, to justify himself to his own conscience, subsiding gradually,) fallen to one far short of the provisions of the will. Still, he would have been willing to make a handsome and sufficient provision for the widow of Lord Aylmer, at least according to his ideas of what that position demanded. It would have been a source of considerable satisfaction to him if this had been accepted; for though all the usual arguments were urged, with which the arch advocate of evil, may be almost heard to plead his cause in the secret chambers of the heart, he could not succeed in altogether quieting the voice within. He said to himself that he, as heir, had an undoubted right to the property. Perhaps the way in which the death of the child had been proved, though such as the necessity of the case required, might not be altogether irreproachable; yet the fact of the death being unquestion-

able, what mattered a few idle scruples as to the means of proving it? True, he had destroyed the will; but this was only done to take from a woman half mad with pride and disappointment, the power of dissipating a fine property among lawyers. Then as to the provision offered, it was as large as in equity Lord Aylmer ought to have given to a woman, who came portionless into the *family;* but be its amount small or great, it mattered not, for he was persuaded she would be too wilful to accept it.

And in this last supposition, as we have seen, he proved to be right. Lady Aylmer, though compelled as it were to silence by the universal conviction of all around, still maintained her suspicions. But she said no more, feeling that her own powers of action, should the time for action ever arrive, would be only weakened by the charge to which further opposition exposed her, namely, that of being interested, or of a mind diseased; and thus the persuasions of others would but be strengthened by her perseverance in contradicting them. Receive anything from Mr. Gorhambury, however, that she would not.

"*He* knows," she said, "that my own con-

victions are unchanged, that I still believe the body brought forward was not that of my child. How it has all come to pass, I can form no idea, I do not pretend to account for it; but what I repeat is, that he knows that I do not believe that the body he and his produced, was that of my child. I still feel persuaded the boy lives, and will one day claim his own. When that day arrives, he shall not find his mother receiving a stipend from the hand that wronged him."

"Wronged him!" exclaimed the by-standers, in a tone that expressed disapprobation.

"Wronged him!" she repeated. "And I will accept nothing—no, not one penny from Mr. Gorhambury."

———

To this resolution Lady Aylmer adhered. She retired from the Castle, and her health requiring almost daily assistance from a more skilful medical man, than was likely to be found in the remote place where her mother lived, decided upon taking a small house in the neighbourhood of the city of G——, that

cathedral town where Mr. Gorhambury had lived, and where his friend the Dean still lived, and where Mr. Gorhambury's curate, Mr. Lovel, lived.

The mother of Lady Aylmer, indeed, survived the shock of these events but a very short time. A paralytic stroke deprived her of speech, and soon afterwards she died. Amid the hurry of events, anything that might have been remarked as peculiar in the conduct of the little boy's maid escaped observation. The state of Lady Aylmer's health rendered it impossible for her to be carried the distance, and over the roads, which led to her mother's house: but the city of G—— not being far off, and the roads good — she was moved there. The aged mother, therefore, died without seeing her daughter again, and thus all clue to the transaction was lost.

Mr. Gorhambury, who suffered for some months the most harassing anxiety from the idea of detection, found his mind considerably relieved by this turn of affairs; and he settled himself down with his wife and his son, to the enjoyment of the princely fortune he had ob-

tained. Such enjoyment at least as ill-gotten wealth bestows!

He found possession, as many, with far less reason, who have only too greedily desired, without using guilty means to obtain, have, from experience, found it. He found possession, an apple of Sodom—all dust and ashes within. He became a very gloomy, dissatisfied, restless-tempered man, far more austere and reserved in his deportment than ever; and accordingly more than ever disliked by all who knew him. For one thing in particular he was especially censured—he never, from the time he came to his fortune, could be prevailed upon, be the occasion what it might, professionally to take part in the services of his Church. Perhaps this, to those who know him as we do, will appear the only sign of grace about him.

It was a sweet, soft summer evening, when Lady Aylmer was lifted from the carriage-bed in which she had travelled, and was laid

upon a couch in the small dining-room of the diminutive, but pretty cottage, which was henceforward to be her home.

Alone, without a friendly voice to cheer her, in the drear solitude of a childless widow; her body crippled, every motion a pain, the light of her eyes extinguished, and the hope which sustained her, so far as this world was concerned, become almost as a delirious dream!

But she had a constant heart, a firm temper, a faithful reliance upon God. The convictions of her relation to One Great Mind, One All-diffusing Head, with whom her moral being was linked by ties indestructible; in whose hands she was, whose providence was over her, as over all, and in whose government there was neither overlooking nor forgetting, nor indifference, nor neglect, for any the smallest living being; her conviction of the reality of these things was deep and sincere. Lady Aylmer was possessed of that blessing of all blessings — a true, strong, lively faith; and let people consider such faith as well or ill-founded —"bottled smoke," if they please, in their arrogant assumption of superior wisdom, so to style it—but let them try to find a substitute;

let them find for us a strength in weakness, a companion in solitude, a solace in suffering, like this — namely, the sure trust in exercises of faith, in devotion to duty, to submission and resignation; not to a blind necessity, but to a Father — to an all-wise and merciful God!

This poor, suffering, weak and forsaken woman proved the truth of these things, as thousands and thousands weak, suffering, and forsaken of all the world, like her, have proved, and, please God, will continue to prove them, in spite of the scoffs and scorns of vain Socialists, who ought to know better, who *do* know better, if the pride and haughtiness of their heart would but let them confess it.

This poor, weak, excitable, suffering, desolate woman laid her head down upon her pillow in that little cottage of hers; and she had the strength given her to utter:

"'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.'"

And will you presume to say she was not the better for it—with your "bottled smoke?"

———

Mr. Lovel, the curate, was the first person who came to call upon Lady Aylmer. The morning after he heard of her arrival, he said to his little daughter, Hernana:

"Child, get thyself ready, and put on thy best becomes; for thou must go with me and make a visit."

"Oh! I am so glad. And who are we going to see, papa? Shall I put on my best bonnet?"

"I told thee—did I not?—to put on thy best becomes; for we are to visit a lady, who was once among the grandest in the land, but is now desolate as the widow of Tekoah; and therefore, my little girl, as far as dress, can do her honour, do her honour; and as far as kindness can give her comfort, give her comfort; and I look to you, my little woman, to try to do that; for I think thou wouldst comfort Despair himself, if thou didst meet him."

"Dress, papa," said Hernana, glancing at her father's hat, which he had taken off, and in his usual careless way had put down upon the chair next him, "dress, dear papa, proves

respect; and one ought to be neat, because the lady was rich, and is now poor—"

Hernana mused a little; till she had settled the propriety, and the kindness, and the delicacy of all this in her heart; and then, taking up her father's hat, and putting it on her hand, as on a pole, she turned it round and round, with an expression half-charmed, half-diverted, and added:

"And this old hat!"

"Never mind my old hat. I am an old fellow, and become an old hat."

"But you are not an old fellow at all, papa," she said, with a look of admiration, as she turned to him. "You are quite young, and one of the most beautiful men that ever was seen; and you don't suit at all with this old hat."

"Well, if I don't, something else does, you little flatterer," said he, pleased in spite of himself with his darling child's simple admiration.

"Something else? Oh, frugality! and suppose—s'pose—s'pose! Why, I really believe, papa, so you could feed the hungry, and

clothe the naked, you would not care if you went without any rim to your hat at all."

"Not very much, perhaps," said he, laughing; "but I should have the sun in my eyes. However, never mind my hat; hats are costly things, and I have no money to spare; but out of respect to this poor Lady Aylmer, brush it up, and make it as spruce as you can, my darling." And he went to his study.

Hernana stood there and mused, as she turned round the hat, with its white, worn line round the crown, and its napless, bare rim, and its shabby, crushed appearance. And she thought upon the anchorite, upon the self-denying, the ascetic, yet the generous, gladsome, sweet character of her father, till she almost thought a hat like that of other men would misbecome him; that his eye, so penetrating and clear, his fine intellectual brow, his smile of unparalleled beauty and sweetness, would look less peculiarly his own, if he wore a hat and coat like common gentlemen: like the Dean, for instance, or like Mr. Gorhambury, or like Mr. This or That. And her face was lit up with a bright enthusiasm, as she looked at the hat. But that expressive countenance saddened

suddenly. She recollected Philip Gorhambury, and that he had made game of her father's hat, and had said that Mr. Lovel looked like a beggar in it; and that there was stinginess, as well as economy, in going about in that way, and that everybody thought her father was either stingy, or an oddity, for wearing such a preposterous hat. She had gone into a vehement passion upon the occasion; still Philip, who loved and admired her above all things, had at length pacified her by saying, that *he* did not think this of her father, that he only meant to tell her what others said, and begging her to be rational, and try to persuade her father to mend his shocking bad hat.

All this had been working in her mind very uncomfortably for some time; and it came into it just now. She could not bear the thought of her father's motives being mistaken, and he held up to ridicule in this way; and she now resolved upon trying to persuade him to get another hat upon occasion of his visit to Lady Aylmer.

CHAPTER X.

The little Hernana was at this time about eight years old; but she was so very fine and intelligent a child, and so accustomed, motherless girl as she was, to act for herself, that she in many things appeared much older, and might be considered as quite a little woman. Her father's singular character, his extreme goodness, his genius and his energy, united with that indifference to all merely conventional matters which distinguished him, had called forth, in this clever and remarkable creature, many faculties which in general lie still dormant at her age.

Hernana was observant, prudent, and provi-

dent; careful of her own little concerns, and indefatigable in helping the one maid-servant—an old woman, who had lived ever since Lovel himself had been born, in the family—in all that she could. The child was indefatigable in assisting this aged person in every duty she had to perform; from sweeping rooms, and peeling potatoes, to what the little girl loved best of all—mending her father's clothes, and washing and starching his bands.

Her father she loved with that sort of profound attachment that one may suppose a little dog, if it could speak, would express for its master. And no wonder, for Lovel was gentle and tender in the extreme; and though somewhat melancholy and thoughtful in his deportment, a gentle gaiety would play like a lambent flame around him, and make him little short of adorable. Upon the subject of her father's equipment, as regarded his outer man, Hernana was anxious, not so much from her own observation—for children of that age are not usually very regardful of such things—but because she had heard Mrs. Alworthy—for by that title was the one servant dignified—very often lament it. The good woman saying,

what a pity it was, that so beautiful a young man as her master should dress almost no better than a beggar.

But little did Lovel heed either the hints of good Mrs Alworthy, or the representations of his little girl. So long as there was one poor creature among his parishioners wanting bread, the money in his pocket was sure to find its way to the baker's, instead of to the tailor's or hatter's. Not that he felt or affected any philosophical indifference as regarded these things, but that really it was impossible to him, to spend any money upon himself, so long as there were others that wanted it more; and he was, moreover, very poor.

The half-pay of a captain in a line regiment, and eighty pounds a-year, his stipend as curate to Mr. Gorhambury, was all that he possessed. About fifty pounds a-year of this was expended in a life insurance, to provide for his little girl at his death. So having sacrificed so large a portion of his income to domestic prudence, he felt that what remained ought more especially to be devoted to those calls of humanity so urgent upon those of his profession, who perform its duties as they ought.

A little sum—not much—but a little sum was also dedicated to the indulgence of dressing his child somewhat better than he dressed himself. His coat might be threadbare, and his hat worn out; but his Hernana, simply as she was always attired, must be respectable and nice.

Mrs. Alworthy lent herself to this last peculiarity with abundant good-will, and for a trifling sum kept the little girl so neatly, that she never had to feel ashamed of her appearance among her young friends and neighbours.

And Hernana loved the pretty straw hat with pink ribbons, which Mrs. Alworthy had just trimmed for her, with all her heart; and the pleasure of a walk with her father, and a visit to Lady Aylmer, was very much increased by the being desired to put it on. Perhaps, too, she might meet Philip Gorhambury: he had not seen her in her new hat.

She wondered whether they must pass the Rectory to go to Lady Aylmer's. But now again she meditates upon her father's hat; and the more she looks at it, the shabbier she thinks it: in truth, she could not think it shabbier than it really was; and she also remembers that

Philip Gorhambury made game of it yesterday —only yesterday. Her father must have a new hat.

She was a privileged person. She might go into her father's little study whenever she would. If he were busy, or if he were melancholy, he would gently send her out again; but most often he took her upon his knee, and cheered his mind with a little prattling and joking before he let her go. So she made no scruple of opening his study door, and there she found him with an open drawer before him. The drawer, in fact, was that in which he kept his money; which money (strange employment for him to be caught in!) he was counting and recounting, over and over. The treasure was made up of pieces but small in value—shillings, sixpences, pence and half-pence. He sighed as he gathered the tiny heap in his hand; and then shuffling it into the farther division of the drawer, he shut it, and looked up with—

"And what do you come for, my little girl?"

She had the hat in her hand.

"Papa, I am come to talk to you about your hat."

"Well, child! But you haven't brushed it, Hernana. You are a little sloven. I thought you would have made it quite spruce by this time."

"Mrs. Alworthy says it is not brushable."

"Nonsense, of Mrs. Alworthy. It looks bad, to be sure," said he, regarding it with a queer sort of smile; "and how it is to last me six months longer, may be a question to be asked; but it must do for the present, my love."

"Oh, papa! but Mrs. Alworthy, and Philip Gorhambury, and everybody, say it is so shabby."

"I am sorry for that."

"Philip says he should be quite ashamed, if he was me, to walk out with such a hat."

"Does he? And does Mrs. Alworthy?"

"No; she never said so; but Philip does, over and over."

"And *are* you ashamed, Hernana?"

"Why—why, no; but," and the colour rose to her olive cheek, "I do wish you *would* buy a new hat. Do, dear papa, do."

"But if I have no money to buy one?"

"Dear papa, but you have some money. You were counting a great big heap of money, as big as this, when I came into the room."

"But suppose I want the money for other things?"

"Oh! but what other things? Nothing shows so much as a hat. Philip says—"

"What does Philip say?"

"He says — oh, papa! it's so shocking — that people call you stingy, and think you mean and a miser; for nobody else would dress so unlike a gentleman. That's what he says, papa; and it makes me almost cry to hear him."

"Come here, my little Hernana, (for you look ready, at all events, to cry now), and sit down upon your father's lap, and let us talk about it. Does my child say that everybody cries shame upon her father, because he does not get himself a new hat? And

do they call it mean and miserly? Was that it? What is mean and miserly, little woman? Do you know what those terms signify?"

"Something very horrid, I am sure; and what everybody hates; and what you are not, I am certain, papa; for everybody loves you."

"That's very good of everybody, I am sure, when a man wears a shabby hat. I did not think there had been so much goodness in the world. So it's mean and miserly in me, is it, Hernana?"

"So they say, and I can't bear to hear it. Do, pray, papa, get a new hat."

"A mean person," Mr. Lovel went on, bending his beautiful, serious eyes upon his daughter's face, "is one who spares his money by taking unfair advantages of others; who endeavours to obtain services unrecompensed; and to discharge duties—the duties of hospitality, liberality, and generosity—by halves, in order to save the appearance, and spare the cost. Dost thou understand me, child?"

"Yes, papa, I do."

"A miser is one," Mr. Lovel continued,

"who hoards his money for no purpose, but to gratify the base desire of mere possession—the sin of covetousness. Now, Hernana, though it does not become a man to speak up for himself, this once I must do it. I am *not* mean, for the person on whom I spare is myself, not another: I am *not* miserly, for the money I save is not intended to be hoarded. Child, we are very poor people, you and I, and it is difficult for the poor to walk uprightly, and honourably, and liberally, and generously; and it is most especially difficult to avoid false shame. But, my dear, we must be all these things, and we *must* defy false shame, if we would acquit ourselves to God and to our own consciences. You understand me, I see you do," he went on, for the expressive eyes of the little girl showed that she did. "And now I will tell you why I have not, and why I cannot for a long time, have a hat. There is a man in this city who has fallen into great poverty by no fault of his own, and his children are crying for bread. He is not a beggar: he cannot take refuge in the workhouse with his children—he would rather lie down and die than do that. He once, when my father was

in difficulties, lent him money: I must now lend *him* money. What I have, he shall have. It would cost me a guinea to buy a new hat—half of all I can spare at present: I choose to give it to this man, to buy bread for his children, Hernana; and I will wear a shabby hat, call me mean and miserly who may. Shall you be ashamed to walk with me now, Hernana?"

She made no answer; she still held the hat. Presently she began to press it to her bosom, and to cover it with kisses—with tears. She slid down from her father's knee, carrying the hat with her. Oh! how she and Mrs. Alworthy brushed and smoothed, and did the impossible to improve its appearance! And they so far succeeded that when Mr. Lovel put it upon his head, he declared that he did not know his own hat again!

And now, father and daughter, hand in hand, are making their way to Lady Aylmer's. They have to pass the Rectory, and Hernana casts wistful looks at the windows upon the

garden side of the house; for their path lay by the wall, towards which Philip's room looked. But no Philip is to be seen. They turn the angle of the garden, and then they command a view of the front door. There is a chariot-and-four standing before it; which is being loaded with trunks and imperials; the postilions, in smart scarlet jackets, are standing whip in hand upon the causeway; and the lady's-maid is packing the inside of the carriage.

"Heyday!" says Mr. Lovel, "off so soon!"

"Where is Mr. Gorhambury going?" asks Hernana.

"Why, to the Castle in Wales, of course; which has just come into Mr. Gorhambury's possession, where else? But here is your friend Philip."

Philip was hurrying down the steps; he had a gun-case in his hand, containing a new gun, the first gun he had ever possessed; and was followed by two pointers, the first game dogs he had ever called his own, having begged them from his mother as the first boon to be granted on occasion of his father's accession

of fortune. He was very proud of these acquisitions, as most boys of his age, which was about twelve, would have been. And he seemed too much engaged, in giving orders in a somewhat imperious manner, with respect to the bestowal of his property, to be able to regard the little girl with coal-black hair, beautiful olive skin, and large dark eyes, who, in her best hat, was coming down the street, hand and hand with her father.

"Hallo! Can't you get out of the way? Why, I declare, it is you, Mr. Lovel; how do you do? Hernana! where *did* you get that pretty hat?"

Hernana smiled, and coloured, and held out her little hand to him demurely, saying:

"But where are *you* going to, Philip?"

"Oh, haven't you heard? Perhaps not—my father kept it secret a little while; but now, everybody knows. He's come into a splendid fortune, and we are all going to live at a magnificent castle that he's got. So good-by to G——, except when he's in residence."

Her countenance was clouded over with an expression of sudden dismay, quite pathetic in so young a child.

"Going away! going away!" she faltered; "you, Philip, going away?"

He looked at her; boy as he was, he already loved her passionately. His look said:

"Do you care, darling? Do you care?"

He flung down his gun-case, caught her in his arms, kissed her, and said:

"Go where I will, I will soon be back wherever you are, Hernana. It's no great way off; I shall be always coming to see you. May I, Mr. Lovel? Shall I, Mr. Lovel?"

"We will talk of that some other time. Come along, my little girl."

She followed, holding her father's hand; but her head turned the contrary way, her eyes fixed upon Philip and the carriage which was to carry him off. He kept making signs to her which she well understood, and with them her heart was cheered and satisfied.

They soon lost sight of the Rectory door; and turning down another street, which led to the fields, entered upon a pleasant common, which spread towards the mountains, and round

which were various small cottages of gentility. They rang at the bell of the wicket which led to the one belonging to Lady Aylmer.

"Mr. Lovel, my Lady," said the maid, opening the door of the small sitting-room, in which Lady Aylmer was lying upon a sofa, placed near the window.

The room was arranged with a certain elegance which bespoke the refined habits of the possessor. The windows were open, looking upon a flower-garden, and were embowered in clematis and abundant roses of various colours. The furniture was neat; and there were several ornaments in Dresden china, groupes in alabaster, bijouterie, &c., with a few choice pictures which had adorned Lady Aylmer's dressing-room in better days, and were unquestionably her own property. Upon a beautifully inlaid table, in the centre of the room, was a fine vase of Bohemian glass, filled with lovely flowers. Everything around was so arranged, as to strike the imagination with a sense of poetic beauty; but what so beau-

tiful as Lady Aylmer herself? The deep black; the peculiar, almost monastic form, of the head-dress she wore; the lovely features—so wan, so pale, so delicate, so instinct with feeling, so interesting from the vestiges of her recent anguish—rendered her altogether the most lovely picture that could be imagined. She strove to rise, as the servant opened the door, but fell back again. With a cry of surprise, she clasped her hands together, when the Curate entered the room:

"You! you! Is it possible? How changed! yet, how unchanged! You, Lovel? Captain Lovel!"

"Louisa!" in a voice of much emotion: "Louisa! Yes, I thought, I feared, and yet, I hoped—Louisa! Do we indeed meet again?"

"Do we meet again? Ah! Captain Lovel! yes, yes; but how? but how?"

"How? indeed!"

"He is gone; they are gone; all are gone. My husband, Lord Aylmer—ah! you never saw him. My boy! my little one! all, all lost!"

"I had heard it. I feared, and yet I hoped:

feared it was you, yet could not—could not help hoping — to see you again — even thus—"

He was evidently very much affected. He turned away, and walked to one of the pictures, pretending to examine it, and striving to compose himself. Whilst he did so, Lady Aylmer, who seemed to find it much less difficult to recover her composure, stretched out her hand, and said:

"Come hither, my nice little girl. Are you Captain Lovel's daughter?"

"Papa isn't a captain now, he's a clergyman," said Hernana.

"Ah! And how long has Captain Lovel left the army?" she said, turning to him.

He looked round at this. That face! that face! oh, that face! What a host of emotions overwhelmed him! He turned away again. He would have given worlds to emulate her serenity—her cruel, cruel indifference, as he could not help calling it. But no; it was impossible.

She saw how it was with him—sighed, as certain recollections passed over her mind, but did not seem in the least to share in his

agitation. She drew the little girl towards her, held her hand, and kept gazing at her with pleasure and curiosity, perusing her features with a wondering air. Then having, as she thought, given him sufficient time to compose himself, she said:

"Captain Lovel married in Spain? I think I heard so. And this little girl? and the lady herself?"

"Yes," said he, turning round at last, and looking gravely and sadly, "yes, he who was Captain Lovel married in Spain, and it was to the mother of that little girl—*my* little girl—all that is left to me in this world, for *she* is dead."

"Ah! death is cruel, death devours all," she said; "the best, the most precious, all go—all go!"

The idea of death is the only one which can hold the balance with that of love. It solemnizes, it pacifies, it exalts. Love and death are kin to each other. When she spoke of death, the wild emotions which for a moment had overpowered Mr. Lovel, at thus beholding restored, in more than earthly beauty, the idol of his first affections, the woman he had so

passionately loved, subsided into something sweet and holy. He drew a chair by the sofa, took his little girl's other hand in his; and thus, as it were, calmed and strengthened by the presence of one who recalled the memory of a later love, he said gently:

"I never thought to see you in this world again."

"You see me now," she answered, "as one scarcely belonging to this world; for all I loved have perished, and the earth is a dark desert to me. You, too—"

"Have lost that which I loved—that which loved me, as none ever can or will love me again."

"But you have this child; and I—" She uttered all this without shedding a tear: her tears seemed exhausted. Then fixing her beautiful eyes upon Hernana, she said: "My very soul is knitting itself to this child. Her name?"

"Hernana."

"Hernana, can you love me?"

Hernana fixed her eyes gravely upon the lady, not quite understanding this scene—as how should she? She recollected what

her father had told her of Lady Aylmer. She thought her the most beautiful creature that she had ever beheld, and all that surrounded her more like some beautiful dream of fairy-land than anything real. She was bewildered with delight. And this lovely lady spoke so kindly, too!

———

The friendship, thus begun, continued. Lady Aylmer became excessively attached to the little girl, and Hernana returned her affection with a love amounting almost to worship.

Mr. Lovel understood the terms to which Lady Aylmer intended to confine him; but that which, some years before, had driven him to Spain—a man desperate, and distracted with an unhappy passion—he was now able to rejoice in, as a calm and sweet solace for his remaining life. Her friendship, the offer of which, ten years ago, had driven him to frenzy, was now received as a precious gift of inestimable value.

To see his little girl thus adopted by

one so endowed with genius and accomplishments, was in itself a matter of unspeakable delight. The young creature, who might have been in danger of becoming singular through the originality of her thoughts, and the noble simplicity of her temper, under such guidance, would be trained into all that the heart of father could desire. And so it proved. Hernana grew up, under these auspices, everything that could be wished; though that she preserved much of her native originality, and continued to be very unlike most of the young ladies around her. She retained all her simple habits of activity and usefulness; habits, indeed, which her father's narrow circumstances only rendered the more necessary as she grew up, and became, unavoidably, a source of somewhat increased expense.

The extreme simplicity of the life she led emancipated her from those fetters, which the conventionalism of general society unavoidably imposes; and this freedom of thought and action, the noble sentiments of her disinterested and warm affection for the two who so well deserved to inspire it; an habi-

tual course of self-sacrifice in smaller, as well as in greater things; the absolute necessity of being content without those vanities, luxuries, and pleasures, which the wealth of those around her enabled them to command, had given a noble elevation to her character. And this shone forth in her countenance, in her form, in her gestures. Her expression was sweet, earnest, fervent; her eyes, when melting with feeling, or kindling with energy, had in them those depths of sensibility which exercise such a strange influence over us all. Her figure, tall and finely formed, was erect as that of a young sapling drawn up amid surrounding trees, unheeded by man, but pruned by the hand of Nature herself, and fed by the great mother; rising graceful, complete, and straight towards heaven. Her voice and gestures insensibly softened by communication with one so refined as Lady Aylmer, had in them a something inconceivably charming. Free, without boldness; graceful, without affectation; expressive of everything that was lovely, generous, or feeling. A charming creature, indeed!

And great was the comfort the lonely and

childless widow experienced in the strong and fervent attachment which she had inspired, and in the occupation she found in thus training the promising girl. Her mind was by these means preserved from sinking into that state of morbid languor and apathy which is but too frequently the result of affections irrevocably absorbed by—of living, with as it were—the dead; for with the dead, the reality of Lady Aylmer's life might be said to be.

The memory of the husband she had loved so tenderly, was cherished by her with a sacredness of devotion, which forbade the substitution, even in thought, of any other object; and this devotion, perhaps, it was which rendered her friendship for Mr. Lovel so soothing, because it was so single-hearted and sincere. The danger to the health of her mind arose not so much from this devotion to her husband's memory—a feeling wholesome, holy, and far from singular — but from the remarkable position with which she stood as regarded her child, which she had loved with a passion rare even in so young and ardent a heart as hers."

In spite of all that had occurred, the persuasion which she had from the first entertained, that the child was not dead, remained, and was only strengthened by years. She had ceased to speak upon the subject to any one; even to Mr. Lovel, in their most confidential moments, this was not touched upon. It seemed as if the persuasion, which was the secret joy and consolation of her heart, was to her like some beautiful image long entombed, which would crumble into dust, vanish and cease to be, if exposed to the common air.

The glove lay in her bosom day and night. That glove was to her heart as her little child. There were moments when imagination worked so strongly, that she almost could believe that so it was! Her whole internal life was made up of the idea—that even in this world she should see her child again. The when—the how, was the subject of constant alternations of hope and fear. But there was one terrible anxiety which, but for her extraordinary strength of mind, might have well-nigh upset it: and that was—the doubt

as to the condition in which her child might be now!

This idea would at times present itself with such agonising force, that it seemed as if her mind must altogether give way under the horror of the suppositions which presented themselves. Then she could only cast herself —poor helpless mother!—upon God, beseeching Him, with cries and tears of anguished prayer, to shield and protect her little one from misery, and worse, far worse than misery—contamination. But, mercifully for her—and, as it may seem to us, scarcely credible—most often her feelings upon this subject were hopeful and calm. It seemed as if borne in upon her mind, that wherever placed, or however situated, her child was doing well.

She dwelt upon his loveliness, the intelligence and sweetness upon which she had so passionately doted; and she seemed to feel assured that the power of their fascinations —wherever exercised—would be felt. She pictured him as radiant in beauty, and surrounded with love. And these sweet delu-

sions of the fancy happily dwelt with her with almost as much pertinacity, as the conviction that the boy was not lost, and that sooner or later he would be restored.

Such is a faint attempt to picture the state of Lady Aylmer's mind.

CHAPTER XI.

The waste of waters lay before, behind, around him; but still he held the child clasped with the left arm to his bosom, whilst with the right he shook the bridle, and with knee and voice urged and encouraged the horse to breast the current, and swim on. The rain fell thick and fast, the clouds were heavy, the sun had set some quarter of an hour. It began to grow so dark, that objects at any distance could scarcely be perceived; the opposite bank, however, was still visible, and towards it the rider pressed forward.

The generous animal he rode, made almost

supernatural efforts to stem the torrent, which, towards the middle of what was now become rather a lake than a river, rushed with violence towards the sea. Every now and then the horse seemed to falter; and the rider's cheek became paler, and his heart almost ceased to beat from fear and anxiety. Not that he cast one thought upon his own fate; he only felt for the precious child that nestled in his bosom—silent, determined, and brave as himself.

The little boy had, in a few brief sentences, been made to understand the nature of the danger, and the necessity for keeping himself perfectly still, so as not to disturb the equilibrium of either horse or rider; and with a heroism, not uncommon among children of his age, he preserved the most resolute silence, fixing his large blue eyes upon the waters before him, and quietly expecting his fate.

Forward! forward! brave struggling steed! Yet one other desperate effort, and the rushing torrent shall be passed. And now they have reached the smoother water, which by this time had covered all the low broken ground

extending to the banks; and so, sometimes swimming, sometimes wading, the horse made his way; and already the steep road of yellow clay, which led upwards towards the mountains, became discernible; and to it Mr. Yates guided his steed. Slippery and steep it was, and difficult the scramble out of the water; but the gallant horse struggled with what strength he now had left, made his footing good, and was climbing up the bank, when, from the thickets which closely overhung this hollow way, strange apparitions suddenly appeared. Dark forms of men, with black locks, black flashing eyes, lean, sinewy figures; and women, with wild yet beautiful features. Every face, however, lighted up with a sort of ferocious energy, as they rushed down suddenly from the bushes; and surrounding the horse, began to attack him and his rider.

The man and child were soon dragged down; and as Mr. Yates was falling, a heavy blow from a bludgeon struck his face, cutting the skin, and drawing blood, some of which dropped upon the saddle as he sank to the ground, still holding the child, now mute with terror, in his arms. The horse, making a

desperate effort, extricated himself from the crowd, and galloped at the top of his speed home.

His rider lay extended upon the earth, face upwards, looking round at the hideous and malignant countenances which surrounded him. He knew, well enough, where he was, and what he had to expect; for two fiendish eyes were glaring upon him—from a woman's face—or rather, from the face of a female fury.

"Ay!" she cried, in her peculiar language, which her victim, however, in some degree understood. "You have it now! Your turn is come at last! You, who sent an honest mother's son—a loving wife's husband—over the salt seas, thousands of miles away, for filching a horse or a sheep. Ay! you have it now! Your turn is come at last! Not *over* —but *in*. Heave him up lads! heave him up! But give him a quieter first; for he can swim like an otter."

"What I did," answered the good and brave man, fixing his eyes calmly and resolutely upon hers, now flashing upon him like two baleful meteors. "What I did, was in defence of the laws of the land; which you, and yours, spend

your lives in breaking. I am at your mercy; you must do with me what you will; but spare the child! the young, innocent child! He has done you no injury."

"Ha! ha! ha! Spare the child—a likely story. *He* has not hurt the Busné, not he! No! no! no! but those he belongs to, have. Who has persecuted the children of Egypt like his father? he, the fine lord, the magistrate. Did he not sign the warrant with his own hand which sent my child to the gaol, and from the gaol over the salt, salt sea. Ha! ha! No harm has he? Let him feel what it is to be childless, like me. Come here; give me the yellow-haired brat. I'll send him over those waters from which they *never* return, and you to keep him company, Squire Yates."

"Spare the child! spare the child!" cried Yates, struggling and endeavouring to free himself from the gripe of the gipsies, who had fastened upon him, and in a manner pinned him down, whilst this colloquy with the beldame was going on; "spare the child! As there is a God above, who sooner or later will take vengeance upon a foul murder, spare the child, and do with me what you will!"

"Give me the child! give me the chicken with the golden feathers and the blue sapphire eyes. Give—give—let me wring his neck before those eyes, and teach Master Yates, and those with whom he consorts, what it is to rouse the blood of the Callo to fury."

And she turned fiercely round, and made a clutch at the boy, who, speechless with terror, his large blue eyes wide staring and aghast, his beautiful golden hair streaming over his shoulders, gazed upon the scene, unable to utter a sound, or shed a tear.

He had been lifted from the ground, and was now in the arms of a tall, strapping young woman, whose limbs, remarkable for their beautiful proportions, showed the sinewy strength of an Amazon, and whose splendid features were lighted up with excitement.

"Give him to me! give him to me!" furiously shouted the old gipsy woman.

"Never, never, never!" shrieked the other, with a wild laugh of defiance. "Never, never, never! for is he not beautiful as a fairy child, with his heaven-blue eyes, and his locks of pale gold. And is he not brave as a lioness's whelp, the bold and beautiful one? See, he

neither utters a cry, nor sheds a tear." And she clasped him passionately to her breast. "And is he not mine? my jewel, my treasure, my idol, and my gem! Fear nothing, my little angel thing, fear nothing; thou art mine, mine, mine!" And again she lifted up the beautiful child, and uttered a scream of wild defiance.

The old gipsy rushed through the circle of men, women, and children assembled round the captured man, outside of which the beautiful Hesther now stood, holding up, with uplifted arms, her prize in triumph. She made a furious snatch at him.

"Hold fast, hold fast, little one!" cried Hesther; and the little one clasped his arms closely round her neck. "Catch who catch can;" and starting off, and dashing with the speed of a race-horse into the thicket, she was instantly out of sight.

The wretched old woman looked after her for a moment, then shrugging her shoulders with an expression of malignant satisfaction, which seemed to say, "I'll have him soon," returned to the spot where Mr. Yates still lay, watching with anxiety, amounting to agony, the result of

the contest. His ideas were becoming confused, and a heaviness, as of death, was upon him; still he was able to see that the child for the moment was rescued; but farther his thoughts could not go, for death, under its most hideous form, was staring him in the face.

"Not there, but here, you fool of the world! Why, when the rush from the hills is over, and the tide has turned, will he not be left exposed to the sun, as plain to be seen as a stranded seal? No, no, not there. In the pool that has no bottom, or a bottom which lies in the pit of darkness. There—drop him in there."

The body of the unfortunate man was lifted up by two or three desperate-looking young fellows; and led by the beldame, who appeared to feel, though her vengeance was satiated, not the slightest compunction for what she had done, they proceeded along the rugged and broken banks of the river.

At some little distance, surrounded by precipitous rocks, was one of those black, sleeping

pools, of depth unfathomable, which possibly may be the craters of extinct volcanoes.

The scene around was one of utter desolation, of blackened, rugged rocks, bare of vegetation, where not the least shrub was found growing, nor the least sign of animal life to be heard; and here, whilst the rain still fell in floods, rather than torrents, and the wind, howling mournfully between the rocks, sang his dirge, was the unfortunate Yates consigned to the deep waters.

They flung him in silently: even they, savage as they were, could not utter their usual shout of triumphant vengeance over their fallen foe. For Yates was a righteous, just, and good man; and whilst, in obedience to the savage commands of their leader and queen, they had most cruelly murdered him, there was a something that awed even them. The man breathes not, however depraved, who does not instinctively acknowledge and reverence genuine worth.

Their blood was up, and they murdered him ruthlessly; but when that was done, the passions of all, save those of the furious woman, seemed assuaged. In silence they raised him

—in silence they bore him along; silently they flung the body into the pool, and stood watching the dark waters as they closed over him; all silent, except the Fury who presided over this scene of cruelty, she alone uttered a loud scream of triumph as the waters received her victim. No one echoed it.

Hesther felt the soft clinging arms of the little boy about her neck, hanging there in terror unspeakable, yet with childish confidence that he should find protection; and all her strong, warm, woman's heart was moved. She clasped her nervous, beautiful arms closely round him; pressed him to her bosom—felt as if she had seized some inestimable treasure; and that all she had lost was restored.

It was not long since Hesther, a young mother herself, had buried a child of about the same age as the unfortunate heir of Avon. He had been a dark gipsy-boy, with coal-black hair and eyes. She had loved him with passion, because he was like

herself; but with a still more vehement passion her imagination had fastened upon the child she now held, because nothing could be more unlike herself, her son, her tribe, than he.

The moment she beheld him, she had been seized with a strange ravishment, such as one feels when something more glorious and beautiful than the soul has ever pictured, is presented to the eyes. She had pounced upon him like a hen eagle, and had clasped him in her strong arms, whilst she stood with the rest to witness the terrible execution about to be done.

Her heart was a warm and loving one; her nature passionate, devoted, and with the strongest instinct for all that was generous and great. She had lost her own child, through whom all these ardent affections had been satisfied; and she had been a widowed, desolate creature ever since; and now, with a sort of wild ecstasy, as she pressed the golden-haired and beautiful child of the Chalié to her heart, she felt that heart to be again overflowing with sentiments more vehement than ever. The darkness of the soul was

dispelled; the frozen currents of the blood loosened: Hesther was herself again.

The idea of the child being taken from her, and sacrificed to the old mother's revenge, had not entered her head, or that any one would dispute her possession of the treasure which she had picked up, as a discarded thing which nobody cared to possess. But the sudden attack upon him had roused her, as we have seen; and her first impulse had been to fly, to dash forward, and escape with her prize into the wilderness.

Not that she feared the old woman, queen though she might be; no, nor mortal man or woman of earth's mould: Hesther feared nothing — nothing above, nothing beneath, nothing around her. It was only in obedience to an instinctive impulse to snatch the child from immediate danger, that she had taken flight; and she had no intention of continuing it to any great distance, or absenting herself from the encampment to which her tribe were accustomed, at nightfall, to repair.

She felt strong enough to guard her newly-acquired possession against all pretenders, be they who they might. She had reason, how-

ever, to apprehend nothing, except from the old woman; for Hesther was beloved, as well as feared — had excited universal sympathy, through her passionate grief at the loss of her own child, and she felt that every one of the brotherhood would rejoice in her new joy.

Hesther had shared with the old gipsy in the enmity she had felt against Mr. Yates; for she, too, had suffered intensely from that gentleman's perseverance in carrying out the ends of justice. Her own husband had shared the fate of the father and son, whose sentence of transportation for life had filled the heart of the bereaved mother with such deep and unrelenting vengeance.

The old woman had shown the strength of her affections, and her passionate sense of injury, by storms of the wildest fury, whenever the subject was even alluded to; venting her grief in the most dreadful imprecations —calling down vengeance upon the head, and uttering the most fearful threats against the common foe.

Such were her hours of excitement. In her more ordinary moods, she was silent,

gloomy; impatient and surly, when spoken to; going about the different affairs in which she was engaged with indifference; and, as I said before, whenever the subject of her grief was mentioned, bursting forth into the wildest paroxysms of rage.

She was, in fact, in these quiet moments, engaged in planning schemes of vengeance; and as nothing less than the life of her enemy could satisfy her, this she resolved to obtain. Wily as a beast of prey creeping stealthily through the thicket, watching the moment to make the fatal and unerring spring, she had waited for several months, till the trial and condemnation of the three gipsies had been almost forgotten, and she had found her opportunity; and then no fury of the 'Halles' in Paris ever quenched her thirst for blood in a more horrible and barbarous manner.

But Hesther took things differently. The beautiful young woman, carrying her child at her breast, had followed the dark-haired Ro, whom she loved with a passion approaching to frenzy, from prison to the hulks, from

the hulks till she saw him on the deck of the ship which was to carry him to exile.

With what wild and vehement embraces, with what passionate but tearless eyes, with what broken exclamations of her love and sorrow, had the parting been made! The ship was under weigh. They put the poor gipsy girl, now frantic with sorrow, on board the boat, and they rowed to land. One of the sailors, humane and kind, took care of the baby; for, desperate with grief, the mother had endeavoured, with the child in her arms, to spring over the bulwarks of the ship, and bury herself and it in the ocean. Her infant had been taken from her; and Jack held it tenderly to his rugged bosom, whilst some of the others endeavoured, in their rough way, to console the mother.

Her anguish was so vehement and so sincere, that it excited the compassion of all.

"Come, my good young woman, be comforted. He's a fine young chap, no doubt, and a handsome; but better fish than ever were caught, are still swimming in the sea.

Don't take on so. And then there's the child, too!"

"Let me be! Let me alone! What do you hold me for? Let me go into the cool, sweet water; for my head is all on fire! And my baby! my fatherless baby! Oh! let us bury ourselves under the billows! My Ro!—my Ro!—Jeptha!—Jeptha!—my Ro! my Ro!"

They got her, however, safely to land; and then they had the humanity to lead her carefully through the sea-port town from which the convict ship had sailed, till they reached the fields beyond, and out of hearing of the great and terrible sea.

The wind blew fresh and wavingly over the wide pastures, now green with waving grass, and filled with red clover and golden king cups. The larks sprang aloft, singing gladsomely in the air; the herds were out in the fields, the sheep upon the hills. She had passed through the town, her head upon her breast, never once lifting up her eyes; a sailor, on each side, holding one of her arms, and followed by the man who carried her baby.

They brought her about a mile onwards, to a charming little rising ground, that commanded a view of the sweet country—of a village nestling among trees, and the hoar steeple of the church peeping forth from the branches. There they stopped.

She lifted up her head — looked round. Her eye recovered its lustre; lambent beams of light seemed to shoot into and brighten it. Her bosom heaved, as it were, with fresh life; her lips parted, as if to inhale the sweet air. She snatched her baby from the man who held it, clasped it close to her bosom, and without uttering one word, good or bad, plunged into a deep and woody lane, and was lost to sight.

CHAPTER XII.

From that time Hesther had quietly rejoined her people, and had followed their usual vagrant life. She had taken her sorrow in a fashion of her own, quietly and sternly; she never had been seen to shed a tear; she never once mentioned her Ro. When Sarah, the old mother, was giving way to the violence of her passion in curses and imprecations, threatening vengeance the most horrible, upon the author of their misery, Hesther, her boy in her arms, would stand looking fixedly at her, with a sort of wonder, mingled with scorn.

"This is not the way," her countenance

said. "This is not the way such should be mourned."

Then she would turn aside, and go alone into the woods and deep lanes, her baby in her arms, and so remain for hours. Whether at these times she wept and mourned; whether she too, in her way, meditated revenge, is unknown. Certain it is, that when the clan had returned to the neighbourhood of Castle Avon, after a wandering of nearly eight months, and that Sarah was openly employed in planning the destruction of Mr. Yates, Hesther offered not the slightest resistance to her proceedings, and she seemed to share fully in the general sentiment, that a sort of wild justice demanded a victim. That for the trifling offence, as the whole gipsy society deemed it, of stealing horses, three men should be cut off from the land of the living, not hanged, it was true, but sentenced to what, in their eyes, was almost more dreadful than death, seemed to *demand* retribution. She readily agreed in this, though she said little; and at the different consultations upon the subject, contented herself with standing there, a tall, im-

posing figure, giving to the assembly the sanction of her presence.

It was during this time that a sudden change came over her existence, threatening to darken the little light that was left in it. Her boy, as he was sleeping in her arms under a hedge, had been stung, as it was supposed, by an adder. She was wakened by his shrieks; there was a small wound upon the little bare ancle; and the child swelled, sickened and died, before the common remedies in use among these people, upon such occasions, could be applied.

From that day Hesther closed her lips in silence. In silence, she carried her baby, wrapped in a fine silk shawl, which she had purchased or filched, no one knowing how she came into possession of it, to the little grave. It was dug under a towering wild rose-tree, now covered with a profusion of sweet flowers, in the deep dingle among the hills where the gipsies were then encamped. She lifted the little lifeless form in her arms, raised it in a sort of agony of despair towards the sky, then she pressed the pallid lips with hers, now

as colourless as those of death itself; and once having touched them, it seemed as if some flood-gate of the spirit had given way: she rained kisses and embraces upon the body with a vehemence amounting to frenzy.

Suddenly she appeared to recollect herself, and recover her self-command and heroism. She brought her little one to the side of the grave, kneeled down, deposited it there, laying it carefully and settling the delicate limbs as if in a bed; then she raised herself, and stood by silent, whilst her friends and companions speedily shovelled the moulds over the body; that over, she turned round, and walked home.

She upon this occasion did as she had before done. In her desolation she sought no sympathy, she chose to be alone; she never mentioned her sorrow to any one. She went on with her usual occupations as before—telling fortunes, or preparing simples, or whatever else it might chance to be; but the slightest approach to courtship, or gallantry, upon the part of any of the young men of her clan was rejected with an almost fearful violence. For regarding her

to all intents and purposes as a widow, many sought her hand in gipsy fashion; but the proud heroine treated their addresses with contempt and horror.

Thus Hesther had for the last three months lived desolate, her heart yearning in its dreariness for it knew not what; when, as she stood by, a cold spectator of the violence offered to Mr. Yates, her eye had been attracted by the beautiful child, as he fell out of the arms of the man they were tearing from his horse. She had sprung forward, at first through the mere woman's instinct, to rescue an infant; but, no sooner did her arms enclose another—a living child! a child without defence—a child belonging to no one! a child that might be to her as her own! than the intensest of affections was rekindled in her heart.

The unfortunate Dido herself, was not more fatally and madly entangled in the meshes woven for her by the feigned Astyanax, than was this bereaved mother, as she pressed the golden-haired child of the stranger to her bosom.

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The execution is over: the gipsies have returned to their tents. The encampment is situated in a sort of crater basin, sunk among the mountains, and entirely filled on all sides with trees. Tall ash and aspens rise like columns to the sky, lifting their green and waving heads above the birches, hazels and alders, with which the dingle is crowded so as to be almost impervious. The gipsies, however, have their paths through the labyrinth, and in the centre stands the encampment. It is placed just where a well of pure water, clear as crystal, walled in by stones covered with mosses, green as emerald, comes bubbling up, and steals away, creeping among the trees and long grass.

There was a rather large assemblage of gipsies here; and they passed away their time making horse-shoes, mending pots and pans, transmogrifying horses, or collecting and preparing simples, or maybe poisons, according to the customs, time out of mind, of this mysterious community. All round this basin the mountains rose precipitously, with bare and blackened rocks, between which green shrubs were growing, and woodbines and

fumarias hanging their light and lovely tendrils. The scattered huts; the horses and asses tethered to the various trees, where little ópen glades of grass presented themselves; the smoke from the fires curling through the green leaves towards the blue sky above; the wild and shaggy figures formed altogether a romantic and beautiful picture, which many among this half-savage race had quite imagination enough to comprehend and enjoy. And who more than Hesther? So to this place, as soon as the night had fallen, still carrying the boy upon her bosom, who, his arms clasped round her neck, had fallen asleep, she returned.

Here the storm had passed away, and the clouds were clearing from the sky. Star after star was peeping forth in the heavens. The pale light from a crescent moon cast now and then a silvery stream upon the grass and huts; but, wherever the trees grew thick, all rested in deepest shadow. One or two fires might be seen glowing red upon the ground, and sending up volumes of smoke; and the large black pots, filled with an indiscriminate mixture of game and poultry—spoil of the woods

and farm-yards in the neighbourhood—were seething over the fire, and giving out a pleasant savour.

But someway that night no one seemed in a humour to enjoy this, or anything else. The men lay under the trees, or in the huts, or lounged about listless and ill at ease: the women unharnessed the horses, put their gear aside, lifted up the covers and looked into the pots; but all with a certain air of indifference and want of alacrity. Even the very children seemed influenced by the general feeling, and were passing up and down noiseless and depressed. For savage and ignorant as they were, they were human creatures after all, and they knew that they had just committed a barbarous crime, at which all nature revolts.

It was not the fear of consequences; for so successful had they been in perpetrating the murder, and hiding every trace which could lead to discovery, that there was not one among them who felt the slightest uneasiness upon that account; but they had done a deed of grievous sin and crime; and their consciences perverted, and little awakened as they were, could not be

altogether silenced. Wandering in moral darkness as they were, the sense of their crime lay like a heavy nightmare upon the soul: not to be removed, yet neither useful nor regenerating. The old haggard Sarah, who still retained the trace of her once great beauty, sat by one of the fires in gloomy silence, speaking to no one, looking at no one; wrapt in her own thoughts.

Suddenly a figure was seen emerging from among the deep shadows of the trees—a tall, beautiful female figure. Following the path, she soon entered into the full gleam of light which shot upon the grass from a neighbouring fire. It was Hesther. She carried the child in her arms, fast asleep, and, as I told you, his little head resting against her bosom, and the golden curls of his beautiful hair falling scattered over her arm. She crossed the little green, and was about to make her way to her own tent or hut; but to do this, she was obliged to pass close by Sarah, who was sitting with her elbows upon her knees, her two hands thrust into the thick locks of her grizzled hair, looking into the embers. She raised her head as Hesther approached, and seeing who it was, started up, and confronted her fiercely, crying:

"Give me that child." And she attempted to lay her hands upon him.

"Hold back! hold back!" cried Hesther. "Touch him if you dare. Mother Sarah—Queen, if you will—touch the child if you dare!"

"I say," answered the other, with a scowl of malignity and rage, "I say the child is mine. Was it not I who pulled that wretched Yates from his horse? Was it not I that threw his carrion body into the pool? Was it not I that revenged myself—you—all of us? And is not this wretched little imp of Satan mine too? I tell you, Hesther—I don't wish to have a quarrel with you, girl—that I'd rather have that child's heart's blood than a crown of rubies and gold; for did not his father, Lord what's his name, sign, with his own right hand, the warrant that made me childless? Ah! and shan't he know what it is to be childless in his turn!"

And she again attempted to lay hands upon him.

"Keep off! keep off!" cried Hesther. "The boy is mine. He above, the Almighty, has taken my child from my bosom; and I was more than a widow—a babyless mother. Do

you know how that feels? Oh no! *You* lost a son, a big grown man; but did ye ever lose a baby?—a little, soft, boneless innocent baby? Never. You don't know what it is. And he who took one, has given me another—a baby, more beautiful than the angels of heaven, more precious than all the dark children of the Caloré put together; for his eyes are like blue-bells, and his hair is as gold, and his lips are coral, and his teeth are pearl. So hold fast, hold fast, my treasure and my jewel, and be not scared, and don't look so daunted with those lovely blue eyes of thine; for she that has thee will keep thee; and they shall tear the heart's blood from my body before they have a hair of thy head. Hesther can tell them that. Ha! ha!"

She uttered all this in a loud, mocking, defying tone, as she kept swinging herself round this way and that, whilst the old gipsy made snatches at the child. Then she suddenly darted away to her own tent, and Sarah returned sullenly to her place by the fire.

The pots, with their smoking contents, are now lifted from the embers, and each one comes with his platter and his wooden spoon. They sit down in a circle, and hands are stretched forth, and each one receives his share. But all passes gloomily—the cloud hangs over them—there is no cheerful sound of animated life, such as usually accompanies their meals—no chatting, no laughing, no appetite. Few can eat, and those who do, eat as if the occupation were a task to be gone through, rather than a pleasure.

Hesther is not among them.

She has shut herself up in her tent—has dropped the canvas door—has lighted a little candle of her own making, and is sitting upon the ground, with the boy upon her lap. He looks in her face, with an asking bewildered eye; but still without shedding a tear. The child seemed, even yet, not to have recovered his recollection sufficiently to weep.

Hesther did not understand this mute sorrow. She was delighted with his tearlessness, as a proof of resolution and courage; qualities in which she, above all, delighted. So, as he

sat there upon her knee, she kept gazing upon him with intense admiration, comforting him, and saying:

"That's my brave baby! That's my fine boy! Not a drop—not a drop. They say the children of the Busné are mere milk-sops—all made up of water and hash; but thou art a hero, darling of my soul! Thou art my hero, and my prince!"

And again she pressed him to her heart, and covered him with her kisses.

The child disengaged himself, and looking seriously into her face, said:

"Who are you? I want to go to my mamma."

"Dost thou, jewel of India? Who and what is thy mamma, as thou callest her? No; thou must stay with me—with Hesther. Thou must have no other mamma but Hesther; she will keep thee safe, for the rest would kill thee. Thou must forget thy mamma, and love Hesther. Wilt thou love Hesther, fondling of my heart?"

"Yes, I love you; and you shall go with me to mamma."

And the child's face began to grow troubled,

and to darken all over, and tears were gathering to his eyes—those blue eyes, than which, she thought, the stars of heaven were not more beautiful, were beginning to be brimful of tears. She loved the brave child, who wept not; but her whole heart was melted, when his spirit at length gave way.

"Oh! don't cry! don't weep! or you'll break my heart, darling of my soul!—don't! You shall go to your mamma. To-morrow, Hesther will take you to your mamma—there. You are hungry; here is a bit of sweet cake for my soul of souls; and to-morrow you shall go to your mamma. Sleep to-night on Hesther's bosom: to-morrow you shall go to your mamma."

The child was hungry, exhausted, sleepy, confused. He ate the bit of sweet cake she gave him; and then he was so drowsy, that he soon fell asleep again. And there she sat upon the ground, sawing her body up and down, with him close to her heart, fixing her eyes upon the sleeping features, with such feelings! Suddenly she heard a slight noise at the entrance to the tent: Hesther looked that way. The canvas door was slowly lifted,

and a face with two terrible eyes—the eyes of the fiendish old woman—was looking in.

Hesther understood the meaning of those eyes better than any stranger could have done. It was as if she saw their unhallowed influence gleaming upon the baby she held. The curtain was in a short time let down, and the evil eye withdrawn; but Hesther fell into a deep musing.

"I know her well. I understand that eye as if I was in her black heart, and could read it written with an iron pen upon the rock. The child's life, by fair means or foul, that hag will have! Yes, she will have it: I know her. She will watch by the hour, by the day, by the month, by the year; but this child's life she will have! Yes, my soul's treasure! in vain may Hesther rise up early, and lie down late; watch thee with sleepless eyes by night, with restless, never-ceasing care by day! Sooner or later thy life-blood she will have! It is written in her bad, black heart—it is to be read in her evil eyes!"

CHAPTER XIII.

Hesther laid the sleeping child upon a wretched flock mattress, in one corner of her cabin, covered him carefully with such blankets as she possessed, and stood a few minutes gazing at him, with looks of the most intense love. With such a look as fables say:

"The mother-ostrich fixes on her young,
Till that intense affection wakes the breath of life—"

Then she turned away, and left the hut; dropping the canvas over the entrance, and carefully fastening it with a skewer. She made her way to the nearest fire, round which she found, as she expected, the leaders and ancients

of the clan in assembled council, with the fierce old woman, who was their acknowledged queen, presiding. Hesther did not join them; but keeping back in the shadow, so as not to be observed, she approached as nearly as she could, and listened to their discourse.

They were, as may be supposed, in deliberation as to what was best to be done. The murder they had perpetrated with so much success that not a vestige remained, still, that Mr. Yates had disappeared would soon be known all over the country; and though they thought that it would be generally believed that he had perished in the flood, still they could hardly hope altogether to escape some suspicion. They were gipsies, whose lawless and even murderous habits were notorious; and they were feared and detested by all that country round. Mr. Yates, as was well known, had been very active in bringing the offenders of the tribe to justice; and it was believed that no gipsy ever rested satisfied in such a case, without revenge. It was therefore the unanimous opinion of the gang, to strike their tents that very night, and disappear from that side of the country. This

was just settled among the men, when Sarah, who had sat by the fire, listening in gloomy silence to what was passing, suddenly struck in with:

"Fine palavering! this danger and that danger; and what do any of you mean to do with the little imp of a Busné? enough to betray us all to the hangman. Besides, the devil's cub can speak—can peach. Do you think, when the hue and cry's up, they won't track us out by the child? ay, that will they. Go where ye will, hide where you will, the golden locks of that child will betray you."

"Well, mother, it can't be helped; the child's there, and you would not have us turn him loose," said one; "better hide him among us till this matter is blown over. Only it's a double reason for marching."

"Hide him! ay, hide him, and welcome!" said the old gipsy, with a malignant grin. "Only let me have the hiding of him; he'll not be traced in a hurry, I promise you."

"No," said a young and handsome gipsy man, who stood near her; "no—no, mother;

I, for one, have had murdering enough for one while. No, no; we won't have the baby butchered."

"You won't, won't you?" repeated Sarah, casting at him a look of unutterable scorn, mingled with resentment of his interference, and contempt of his humanity. "Nobody asked you to do it, Master Chicken-heart."

"No more chicken-heart than yourself, Mistress; but let's have no more butchering, if you please. I don't like it. I have done nothing but see spirits in the wood-shadows ever since. I declare I wouldn't go back to that water-side by myself—no, that I wouldn't, for all the world! and I used to care for nothing, not I!"

"Strike the tents, and pack up bag and baggage," began the principal man of the party, "and don't stay squabbling here. Come, Mistress, lend a hand, will you?"

But Sarah remained sitting by the fire, mumbling and talking to herself, as she was often in the habit of doing, in a strange, witch-like, mysterious manner.

Hesther crept down upon her knees, then upon her face, and like a serpent, twined herself

among the long grass, till she got close behind the old beldame, and could distinguish what she was muttering; and this, she gathered from among the indistinct sentences:

"They may do as they will, talk as they will; but that boy's life I'll have. Did they not rob me of mine? and will I not rob them of theirs! Did he not, that fine young lord, sit as cool there, as if he was penning a love-letter—writing down, what was worse than death to me and mine? Hesther's taken one of her absurd fancies to him; and she thinks—fool that she is!—there is strength enough in her right arm to defend him. Perhaps so, against any man in the squad, but not against me; no, no, not against me. I'll have his heart's blood, and lave his silver skin with it, as sure as I am of Egypt and a true Caloré. Ha!" suddenly turning round, "what's creeping there? Hesther! you adder!"

"No adder, mother; but Hesther!" said the young woman, suddenly starting up in her true shape, as if touched by the spear of Ithuriel. "Here I am. I've heard what you were saying to yourself; but mind me—and mind me; old, and mother of the clan, as you are, if you dare

lift a finger against that child, you shall rue it the longest day you live; if you dare lay a finger on *him*, fingers you will not like shall be laid on *you*. Nay, it's no use spitting fire from your eyes like a wild cat in the dark. I say, and you know me, mother; that child is mine, I love him; and woe to him or to her, who dares harm a hair of his head."

"Yours! I'd be glad to know—yours, indeed! Mine—his — hers — anybody's. How come he to be yours? I'll tell you what, Hesther, we are not going to run all our necks into the hangman's noose, to please you or any one. That child dies this night; and you may bury him yourself, if you please, under that tree; for we are not going to carry him all the world over, as the sign and the signet-mark of what has been done. Make your best of it; or so it is written, and so it shall be."

And as she spoke, she rose slowly from the fire; and with an air of determination, which had something in it of dignity, turned towards Hesther's tent.

But Hesther, uttering a screech like that of a catamountain, flew upon her; and in her

rage would well-nigh have torn her to pieces, had not others of the tribe interfered. They parted the combatants; the old woman suffering herself to be separated from her adversary, and to be persuaded to go to her tent, and prepare for her departure; but as she did so, she cast a sidelong glance at Hesther, which the other but too well understood.

And now all was hurry and movement in the camp. Horses and asses were being caught and brought in from the thickets, and were harnessed to the small rude covered carts which served the company as baggage-waggons. Wild figures of men and women were seen glancing among the trees and huts, now reddened by the glow of the fires; for the moon had gone down, clouds were rising from the horizon, and gathering over the sky: and it was becoming very dark.

Hesther wanted little light in her tent. A candle, made of the pith of rushes, dipped in tallow, served her to collect her small property; her portmanteau being a large iron pot, into which she stowed away, one after another, all her possessions. Having done so, she

carried it out to be packed upon one of the carts; and then returned for the child, who lay still fast asleep.

Again she looked at the beautiful boy with an admiration approaching to rapture, as there he lay, so lovely in slumber. His cheeks still wetted with tears, but the colour as of the Provence rose. His golden hair, in rich curls, hanging about his face and pretty childish shoulders; one waxen hand under his head, the little fingers bare and closely clenched; the other, holding the blanket, covered with a curiously-worked glove. Hesther stood gazing some time in, as I said, a perfect ecstasy of admiration: then her attention was caught by the glove, the little quaint gauntlet of leather, sewed and lined with blue silk. I know not what impulse possessed her, or what were her intentions, if she had any, or whether she merely acted from spontaneous admiration of the delicate piece of needle-work; but she lifted the little hand, and gently drew off the glove; and then from her bosom she took a small bag.

The bag had once been embroidered with various gaudy colours in a rich pattern, inter-

woven with gold threads; but now it was all dirty and discoloured; and the ribbons with which it was drawn, and which had once been white, were become a dingy brown. Such as it was, it was Hesther's best and dearest treasure; for it had been a present from her husband, who had found it in a wood, left there by some forgetful one or other. He had appropriated it without hesitation. and had given it as a love-token to his Hesther.

She put the little glove in, and restored the bag to her bosom; then she gently lifted the child, rolled him in the blankets, and laid him on the ground; whilst she disposed of the bedding in the same way as the rest of her household furniture. Sadly, she lifted the boy in her arms, and carried him forth with a proud, determined air; and leaving her tent to be taken down and disposed of by some of the men, prepared to take her departure.

"Which way?" she asked.

"Right across the mountains, and so up the valleys to Scotland. We shall be in the skirts of Plinlimmon to-morrow, and the night after towards Mow Cop, so we are diligent."

The tribe started forward; and the dingle

was soon forsaken, and left in silent darkness.

The boy, awaking in the morning, found himself in Hesther's arms. She carried him the whole of that day. The little child kept asking for his home and his mother, and Hesther, without the slightest scruple, kept assuring him that to his home, and to his mother, he was going. But, brave as was her spirit, she travelled on sadly; lost in melancholy musings, being convinced of the unchangeable determination of the old gipsy-woman to effect the destruction of this creature, so infinitely precious; and equally convinced that if resolved she was certain sooner or later to succeed; and, moreover, that once resolved was with her to be for ever resolved; for Sarah was never known to change in her purpose, when her object was cruelty or blood.

So they journeyed on, day after day; till, crossing the moorlands of Staffordshire, they plunged into that wilderness of hills and deep valleys, moors, heaths, bogs and crags, springs

and streams, which constitute, what by some have been called the English Apennines; and which is one unbroken mountainous district, extending northwards from the moorlands of Staffordshire to the Cheviot.

In one of the deepest and most desolate of the many solitudes which these hills contain, the gipsies at length halted. They settled down at no great distance from Blackstone Edge, in a narrow, lonely valley, entirely uninhabited; though at the distance of a few miles, more or less, engines upon all sides were smoking, spinning-jennies whirling, and all Lancashire and Yorkshire at work.

So long as they had continued upon the road, Hesther's apprehensions had been pretty much at rest. Sarah was busied in the occupations incident to the direction of the march, and seemed to take little heed of her or of the boy; but no sooner were they settled in their new encampment, than all her terrors returned. She had not one moment's rest. The cruel eye of the old gipsy seemed for ever upon her, watching an opportunity. The looks she at times would cast upon the child were almost

diabolical. Perhaps Hesther felt the more exposed to this persevering malignity, because the place the encampment now occupied was so bare. There was not a tree to be seen; nothing but a barren, heathy valley, shut in by black crags and hills that towered to the sky, and at the foot of which the gipsy huts lay scattered, with the horses and asses browsing round them.

The boy, in the meantime, was, as children invariably do, becoming reconciled to his situation. Hesther was indefatigable in her endeavours to please and amuse him; flattering him with the promise that he should soon rejoin his mamma, till the idea, and with it the wish, seemed gradually dying away in the infant's heart. He became passionately fond of Hesther; and this would have added incalculably, if anything could have added, to her extravagant fondness for him. Once or twice she had been in the most imminent danger of losing him; once she caught him just as he was beginning to devour a cake which Sarah had given him, and which, as Hesther divined but too well, was poisoned. At other times, the woman, like the Jew's daughter in

the old ballad, would be endeavouring to beguile the innocent she had resolved upon sacrificing into her tent, and once Hesther caught Sarah in her own, with her hand actually upon the child's throat.

The young fervid creature, so bold in action, so little used to fear, could ill brook this perpetual anxiety; she became moody, nervous, excited almost to the verge of frenzy. Sometimes she vented herself in paroxysms of rage, calling down the wildest threats and imprecations upon the old woman; at others, silent and gloomy, casting glances towards her, as if she could have killed her.

The catastrophe came at last. Many days had passed in this manner, and still the child lived, and endeared itself more and more to Hesther's heart; but day by day she became more silent and more gloomy, and as if meditating some fell purpose. And so she in truth was. Thus her thoughts ran:

"It is vain; it is nonsense; it is folly. Sooner or later—very soon, perhaps—she will be too sharp for you one way or other; sooner or later she will have thy life's blood, darling of my eyes! I know she will; but—ay, but—she

shan't; no, she shan't. One of you two must die, I see it in her face; and which ought it to be? the old hag or the young cherub—she or you—she or me? for die I will when thou diest, my heart's own, and only one. No; it shall never be said that Hesther stood by and saw such a deed done, or that Hesther wanted pluck and heart to take care of that she loved as the apple of her eye. It's a horrid, painful, odious thing to do; but what signifies that? It may be found out, and the whole tribe will hate me—let it—let them. She shan't have you—she shan't, my sweet, sweet innocent!"

This had been the tenour of Hesther's thoughts for many, many days. Alas! for her poor, blinded, ignorant, untutored nature! One night she had left the child asleep in her tent, having gone for some little matter or other, to the hut of one of the tribe. She never left the boy even for a quarter of an hour without uneasiness, and the greatest impatience to get back to him; but she had seen the old woman go into her tent, and believed her to be asleep; so she stayed rather longer than usual, talking with one or two gipsies

whom she happened to meet on her way back, when suddenly casting her eyes towards her hut, she saw, through the imperfect light of a star-lit but moonless night, a dark figure stealing towards it. She could not have shrieked if she would have given the world for it; an icy terror ran through her veins, and rage and fear rendered her speechless; but quitting her companions, she darted forward, and rushed to her tent.

Through the lifted canvas the inside of the little room was dimly visible. The child was sleeping upon its pallet; over it stooped a dark figure, a hand was on the infant's throat. Did she see it, or did she magnetically divine it? She rushed forward, and tore the arm backwards.

The head was released; the old woman turned away, and with a short laugh of defiance, extricating herself from Hesther's grasp, left the place.

To fling herself upon her knees by this side, listening in an agony of suspense for the child's breathings — to fancy she heard them *not*—then to believe she heard them— to stand up, strike a light, and in anguish

indescribable approach the bed, upon which she scarcely dared to look, were all the work of an instant.

The light falls upon the little face. It is blackened; it is struggling; it is convulsed! but, oh! joy, joy! he is not—is not dead! The delicate white throat bore the impress of the cruel gripe which one second more of time would have rendered fatal, but life was not extinct.

She lifted up her baby; she carried him gasping into the air. She sprinkled his face with fresh water from the stream; she held him in her arms whilst, poor little creature, he struggled in the agonies of returning life —that awful second-birth pang! and, when those convulsions were over, and lulled in her arms and soothed by her crooning, loving voice, the little one had fallen asleep at last, Hesther again laid him down, and casting herself upon the earth by his side, and burying her face in her hands, her courage and fortitude gave way, and she wept long and bitterly. The sufferings which the child had endured in the death-struggle affected her deeply. She sat there till long after midnight, for she could

not and would not sleep. She was summoning all her resolution and hardihood for the deed she had resolved to do. This last event seemed to have been the answer to all her doubts and misgivings. No time was to be lost, if the child's life was to be preserved—this night, this very night it must be done!

Poor creature! there she sat, abandoned to her own impulses for good or evil, with a conscience seared and perverted, yet not altogether dead, in sad confusion of moral feeling. All that was best and tenderest within her ministering to all that was fiercest and worst; the yearnings of fondest pity, and the most generous feelings of protection for the innocent and the oppressed, mingled with a hatred, the strength and bitterness of which is scarcely conceivable by those tamed and disciplined by early education, and all terminating in a relentless determination, to take the life of a fellow-creature.

By the light which she still kept burning, Hesther looked at her hands, those beautifully-formed, but large, strong, nervous hands; and then she clenched and grasped her fingers together, as if to try their strength. Her

teeth were fast set, her eyes distended, her cheeks pale as death, her very lips colourless; and then, she rose from her seat by the child's bedside, took one or two turns up and down, as if to gather and concentrate her resolution, left the hut and made her way to Sarah's.

It was a wild, howling, mournful night. It seemed to her as if evil and unhappy spirits were abroad, and that their voices might be heard in the wailing wind. Clouds were blowing up from the north, and one by one those calm luminous eyes, which looked down from heaven upon her, were being obscured. In the dim light, the dusky forms of the dark mountains which enclosed this little spot on every side seemed threatening her. A mighty power was there, somewhere—a power that summoned her to obey, and that said to her heart: "Thou shalt do no murder." But Hesther would not hear. She closed her eyes and she stopped her ears, that she might neither see nor, hear that which might arrest the course she had resolved upon.

Most of us—all of us—have, at moments

of our lives, known by experience the temptation of obstinate blindness which now beset this poor creature. God preserve us from it!

The old woman's hut was quite at the other end of the encampment, and Hesther had to pass several of the tents; but this she heeded not: her mind was too highly wrought to care for detection, still less to take any prudential means to avoid it. Every one, however, slumbered: the men, women and children within, the dogs without, the tents. The horses and asses had ceased to browse; all were wrapt in solemn sleep, forgetting the past labours of the day —all but the restless spirit, urged forward to evil by a sort of fatality — evil engendering itself.

The stars looked down in their calm majesty upon the guilty scene, but she looked not up at them; she heard only the fitful wailing of the wind, which moaned in harmony with her feelings, for she was very sad, though resolved; mourning over the execution she thought herself called upon to do. So she traversed the encampment, unseen by any mortal eye;

and she came to Sarah's tent, and lifted up the curtain over the entrance. It was so pitchy dark within, that she could distinguish nothing; but she could hear the heavy breathings of one fast asleep. She entered; and her eyes beginning to be accustomed to the obscurity, she could now observe, on one side, an unformed mass of blankets, and tattered cloaks and coverings, from whence the sound proceeded. But the obscurity was such, that she could not at first even discover how the sleeper was placed. Stealthily she crept to the side of what can scarcely be called a bed —not with "Tarquin's ravishing strides," but creeping like a cat—like a she-panther. When she got close to it, she could easily trace by the sound which way the head lay. The rest was done she knew not how—she never could remember how! Those few moments of her life were a blank, and remained for ever a blank; they never returned to her memory. The last thing she recollected was kneeling down, stealing her two hands under the blanket, and the feel of a wiry writhing neck. The next was finding herself stretched on the ground by the child's bed, clasping him wildly

in her arms, and covering him with a shower of kisses, as the child suddenly awakened, cried, and resisted.

The next morning, the old gipsy-woman was not, as usual, among the first to be seen stirring in the encampment. The others took little heed of this for some time; everybody else went about as usual, Hesther among the rest, leading her child by the hand. At last, they began to wonder what had become of the old mother. They were slow to enter her tent, for she was always particularly jealous of intrusion. Some went to the entrance and listened; but they heard nothing stirring: at last, one bolder than the rest, ventured to peep in.

"She's asleep still," said he, drawing his head back again.

Hesther continued to play with and attend to the child. She sat a little apart upon a heap of stones.

The kettles were set on, the community was

soon busily engaged preparing breakfast, and soon the savoury messes were smoking upon their wooden platters. Then Hesther came up, carefully fed her boy, taking not one morsel herself. This done, she went and sat down again in the old place: the little fellow played with some acorns and nuts she had given him; she, employed herself in weaving mats of ling, at which she was particularly expert. There was an air of repose upon her face, as of one who, by the execution of some bold and difficult enterprise, has lifted a load of anxiety from the heart, and escaped a pressing danger. She seemed to take little heed of what was going on, and to be lost in her own thoughts.

About two hours after, she was aroused by a sort of cry, and then these words reached her ears, accompanied by a yell of distress: "The old mother is dead!" When she heard this, she rose quietly from her seat, and still holding the child in her hand approached the encampment. The whole tribe were collected, like a swarm of bees, at the door of Sarah's tent. She went up and stood in the outer circle, not endeavouring to make her way through, as many did; but in a sort of suspension of all

life and feeling—for so it seemed to her—watching what would come next.

It was a dreadful spectacle that did come next; for they carried out the dead body, with its face fearfully distorted by the last agony, and as she stood there, they brushed close by her, and the body touched her very clothes. She saw the face distinctly—that horribly distorted face; and the eyes, which stood wide open, seemed to glare upon her—nay, sign to her! She felt very sick, and turned her head away. Nobody, however, observed her: they were all too busy buzzing and bustling about the corpse. Not the slightest suspicion appeared to enter into any one's mind. They believed that the old woman had died in a fit; for she was known to be subject to certain paroxysms, which they attributed to possessions of the Evil One, and in which she would fall to the ground, writhe her limbs, and exhibit the symptoms of epilepsy.

Common sense suggested, that in such a paroxysm she had expired, and the distortion of the features favoured the idea. So they buried her with a gipsy funeral, and without the ceremony, as one may be sure, of an in-

quest; and when that was done, the tribe, as if taking a dislike to the place, shifted their quarters, and travelled far northwards, even till they crossed the borders of Scotland.

In the wild tract of country which separates the two kingdoms, they remained for a long time; so completely out of the way, that Lady Aylmer's advertisement, and the proffered reward for the discovery of the boy never reached them. Even if it had done so, it is doubtful whether any one among them would have been found daring enough, under the circumstances, to claim it, by giving information; besides, the children of Egypt are true as steel to each other, though so unscrupulous in their dealings with the Busné.

As it happened, however, the temptation did not arise; and so the child, the darling treasure of the unfortunate Lord and Lady Aylmer, remained a vagrant changeling among the gipsies, under the care of the high-minded, but violent and guilty woman, who had conceived for him such an unparalleled affection. And what will be his fate? what will he become? the precious one!

To return to Hesther: from the moment the

distorted face of her victim had been seen by her, the whole of her inner life was changed. The hideous aspect of her crime thus presented, seemed to have awakened in her a sense of its deformity; from that time this terrible mask was ever present before her eyes, sleeping or waking, toiling or resting, it pursued her; it was the shape taken by remorse. It was only a face; but that distorted face mingled its poison with everything.

She became melancholy, and gloomy, unsociable, ill-tempered, and unamiable, which, in spite of her violence, she had never shown herself before. Bitter in her words, rude in her manners, prompt to take offence, and unrelenting when offended; she was disliked and shunned by her fellows, as a natural consequence, and so became only the more bitter and unsociable. To all alike were these humours shown, the result of an accusing conscience, which, incapable of regenerating, only irritated and fretted the spirit, consuming, as it were, the victim it could not purify. No one escaped the effects of this change except the child.

This child only appeared to be the more endeared to her, the more her affections were

hardened against every other. She loved him with a concentrated depth of passion, which is scarcely to be described; her whole life seemed devoted to the endeavour to please him, and make him happy; she toiled unremittingly to procure for him comforts and luxuries which for a child of the Caloré would not be even thought of; and she became more hateful in their eyes on account of this, than perhaps for all the rest. But she set the strictures of her fellows, upon this subject, at defiance. She was strong enough to protect herself and her treasure against the world; and now, added to her former reputation for deeds of prowess, there was something about her, which every one held in a certain dread. The strength of her passion had a kind of sublimity in it. And so she held on her course; and the boy being reared in this way, bid fair to attain a surpassing beauty and strength, and to unite in himself all the finest physical qualities of the two races.

CHAPTER XIV.

We are returned to the wild, moory, hills of Lancashire, to that region of mountains and valleys, that wilderness of barren country which lies beyond Blackstone Edge. Cotton factories are now smoking in various directions, and the long lines of dwellings belonging to the operatives, have spread on all sides; towns of immense extent have sprung up, where, about half a century ago, all was silent as the desert; and these savage tracts are become almost the most populous regions of England. Yet still, in that vast extent of country, large districts are left, unoccupied and unredeemed, of

desolate moor, craggy dell and far-stretching chains of fells and mountains; and into one of the most secluded of these fells we are now to go in search of him whose strange history I relate.

It is about three or four years since we lost sight of Claribert, heir of Avon, he was then a beautiful, blooming infant, with large blue eyes and golden curling hair, an object of the wildest attachment to the half-savage heroine who had adopted him. Let us go and look at him now.

There is a black, dreary mountain, frowning over and closing up at one end a long valley so deep and narrow, that only for a few hours in every day can the beams of the sun penetrate into it. On one side, the face of a rock of dark stone rises precipitously from the glen, seeming to render it quite inaccessible, though now and then, in various fissures of the precipice, tufts of grass and a few stunted shrubs and some scattered broken heaps of earth, and rubbish overgrown with brambles, afford a perilous footing. A little stream, clear as crystal, but looking black as ink from the nature of the ground over which it flows, wanders among

long coarse patches of grass and reeds at the foot of the precipice. Upon the opposite side, the face of the mountain, somewhat less steep is formed of heaps of black, broken stones and earth, almost as difficult of access as the other, so that it is impossible to conceive anything more lonely and secluded than the place appears—more shut out from all communication with the world. And here Hesther has fixed her dwelling.

There is a little rude hut, with walls of rough stone and roofed with sods, standing, sheltered under the rock, close by the side of the stream. The smoke is curling slowly from a chimney or rather hole in the roof, having a few clods round it, and the light blue cloud thence rising is the only object which can be called cheerful amid this dreary waste. The lonely woman is sitting upon a stone by the side of the stream, resting her cheek upon her hand and looking into the water, not as if she was in search of anything, but as if she was so deeply lost in thought, that to her outward sense all was vacancy. Her face is lean and haggard, and there is an expression in it which tells of fierce struggles that have gone on within, as if the

soul had been engaged in direct contest with the adversary, but had not, alas! conquered. The traces of intense suffering, of the wildest passion and despair are visible, but not a line which expresses that the victory over sin and sorrow has been effected. She looks gloomy, dark, and deeply melancholy, but neither softened nor repentant. Proud defiance may be read at times in her aspect, as if she knew herself to be guilty and wicked; but guilty and wicked, she repented not, obstinately resisting that conscience whose reproaches she could not escape. Were the crime to do again, she would do it again, and such was, in truth, the state of her mind.

Every feeling with Hesther was intense—whether of joy or sorrow, love or hate, it mattered not. Her mind was reflective, her principles clear, her moral sense almost preternaturally strong; therefore, the voice within spoke loudly and distinctly; and though, perhaps, the command, "Thou shalt do no murder," had never reached her in the injunctions of the Decalogue, yet a command as imperative spoke clearly within her soul; and she knew that to murder was a dreadful crime.

But she had hardened herself obstinately against the acknowledgment of that crime.

A dreadful weight! The recollection of it lay upon her soul, but she yielded not under it. She would not humble herself to repent of what she had done. She had committed a guilty deed, and she knew it; she felt the load of sin upon her spirit, but she bore it as a martyr bears the chain that is eating into his flesh—the flames that are searching his very heart—unflinchingly and resolutely.

She looked at the boy, that passion of her soul, and she thought him not too dearly purchased. It seemed to her as if to regret that which had ensured his safety, would have been to undervalue him—a sort of offence against his glorious worth and beauty. To preserve this worth and beauty undiminished—to keep him bright and unsullied, body and soul—to prevent the loveliness she so treasured and worshipped, from being defiled and degraded by associating with the brute natures around him—was what had driven Hesther into solitude, and separated her from her clan. Not that she had left them altogether, indeed—for she kept up a communication with the party

to which she had belonged—but she shunned intercourse with them as much as she could, and endeavoured to keep the boy as far as possible from contamination.

Her tribe left her very much to herself. There was something about her that none of them could understand. She seemed of another nature, and to move in a different sphere; and, as concerned the boy, they, in truth, partly shared in Hesther's feelings; looking upon his rare beauty and sweetness as a sort of sacred thing, which even among these rude people produced its effect. Strange, but most true, in such adverse circumstances, both had been preserved.

Lower down this valley, you may see the tents and huts of the gipsies scattered up and down, and their dogs and their carts, and donkeys, and rough, lean, mountain horses, intermingled, grazing upon the scanty herbage. The scene is wild, desolate, savage, and romantic. Hesther sits there, silent and thoughtful, looking into the water, and everything around her is still; but lower down, there is a hubbub of loud voices to be heard, and every now and then, a wild laugh or a savage imprecation, mingled with the hammer of the smith, as he

labours at his rude anvil; and the voices of women prattling or scolding, and of dogs barking and growling. Suddenly the noise increases, and becomes loud and menacing There is a brawl going on below. Men are quarrelling; and the sound of blows, and the outcries of women, startle Hesther from her reverie. She looks up, and then anxiously round her. Where is he? What has become of him? Ah! he is down there—he is down there among them. "It's of no use—no manner of use: he will be among them, do what I can. Charlie—Charlie."

"Here I am, mammy!" answers a clear voice from the precipice above, where the enterprising child had clambered to a place fearfully abrupt and perilous. "What do you want, mammy? Here I am."

"There! how could you get there, Charlie? You bad boy! What could lead you to scramble up there? You'll break your neck! Come down, come down instantly!—or stay! better stay! and I'll come and help you."

"You can't get up! you can't, mammy! Don't try! don't try! I'm coming down as fast as I can."

"What did you go there for? You naughty, naughty boy! Come down! Oh, you'll break your neck, clambering so! How dare you go without my leave? Naughty, wicked boy! but if I catch you—"

"Mammy! mammy!" looking down from the eminence upon which he had perched himself.

It was a little sandy platform in front of a fissure in the rock, up to which the child had scrambled, it would be difficult to say how, so steep was the precipice; but he was lithe and agile as a squirrel, spirited and fearless. He was afraid of nothing. He would dash into the mountain stream, and dive and swim like a young otter, plunging in the deepest and darkest pools, or sporting with the foaming torrent at will. He would scale the most formidable precipices, swinging himself up by the tussocks of grass or roots of trees, never seeming to know what the sensation of dizziness could mean. He would mount to the topmost pinnacle of the highest tree, and there sway about, blythe and fearless as a bird.

In every action that depended upon the perfection of agility, the little boy was, even

among the gipsy urchins around him, without a peer. He had, as I said above, the litheness and dexterity of an animal—would glide, and climb, and steal about, and through places, where it seemed incredible that a child could go.

Hesther trembled at his daring; for, bold as was her temper, the intensity of her affection made her a very coward as regarded her Charlie; but she triumphed in his successful daring, and gloried in the idea of the triumphs he achieved, over his fellows in feats of this nature.

But when his daring spirit of adventure carried him, as it had done in the present instance, beyond the limits of common safety, Hesther, irritated by her terrors, would become enraged beyond measure, and, provided no one was by, would vent her fury outrageously. Before witnesses, however exasperated, though every limb was quivering with agitation and anger, not by one word would she suffer her feelings to find vent. Not only would she suffer no creature upon earth to utter a syllable that could offend her darling, but she had never in any one instance been over-

heard to utter even the shadow of a reproof herself.

She looked upon him, it was evident, as a thing too rare, too exquisite, too precious, to be exposed to common handling; and she taught others, by her example, to respect, as she did herself, the divinity she worshipped. When no one was by, however, Hesther would, as we have said, sometimes give way to violent passion. But he, who loved her with that love which casteth out fear, and knew well, by the child's instinct, how passionately he was beloved, would sit, maybe at the top of some pyramidal larch or fir-tree, swinging about upon a branch that threatened every moment to give way, answering her agonizing paroxysms of rage and terror by his joyous shouts of laughter; and then, when it would seem that nature could bear it no longer, and the heart of the strong woman would at last give way in tears, down the tree would he glide, almost as swift as a bird might have stooped from the wing, run to her with open arms, clasp her vehemently round the neck and cover her with kisses.

Oh, then! it is not to be told what emotions swelled in that wild untamed heart. How she would strain him to her bosom, sobbing and laughing and scolding and embracing by turns, and feeling, oh with such an intensity of love! that it mocks all power of description. No doubt these unchastened denizens of the wilds, these children of untutored nature, feel, when they do feel, with a depth that our busied life of circumstance perhaps forbids.

And now Hesther stands at the foot of that fearful face of rock, in fear unspeakable. Nothing can cure her of such terror when she sees the child in danger, and she is stamping like a fury, as the sweet face of the boy is seen peering over the precipice, smiling like one of those cherub faces which in old pictures you see peeping from among the clouds; looking as beautiful, as innocent, and as heavenly. He was crying out:

"Don't, mammy; don't come up; you will hurt yourself. I'll be down in a moment, mammy."

And she is exclaiming: "You naughty,

wicked, bad boy! how *dare* you get up there? Come down this instant, or see if I don't catch you!"

And in no way scared by the passion, or the threat, of which he well knew the impotence, the little fellow scrambles down, while she stands gasping with fear, as she watches the descent. He held something in one hand, which rendered the feat more perilous, but he accomplished it, and laying what he so carefully guarded upon the ground, ran to her as usual, gay and confiding, flung his arms round her neck, almost dragging her to the ground with his vehemence, and kissing her half a hundred times, cried out:

"Naughty mammy! If you go into a passion, I'll beat you."

And then again kiss upon kiss, till he feels himself forgiven.

She sat down upon the grass, exhausted with the violence of her emotions; and he ran to the place where he had deposited his treasure, and returning, produced a young owlet not yet fledged, which he had captured from the nest.

"There were three of them, mammy. I

thought the mother-owl would never miss one; I want a playfellow so. See what a queer looking thing it is! with its great big round eyes, and its funny white puff of feathers, looking like the foam in the mill-pool. Mammy will let her boy keep the owl, I want something to play with."

"You don't deserve to keep it. Naughty boy, to frighten me so, and go into such places to fetch it! what do you want with playfellows? There are playfellows, more than enough, down below."

"They don't play as I like; I don't like playing with boys."

"What do you like to play with then?"

"The clouds, and the winds, to dance with the branches, and play hide and seek with the leaves," was the answer; "but the clouds cannot speak to me," he went on, "and the leaves cannot love me. And I want something to feed, and to put to bed, as you do me; and this darling little owl can fight me, and quarrel with me, as you do; and I can love him, and feed him, and put him to bed as you do me."

"And you'll love him better than me?"

"Oh, no, no!" throwing himself upon her bosom again, "nothing—nothing, as I love my mammy, but I want to have something to be good to, as you are to me, and to mind me."

"As you don't me?"

There was a joyous laugh for answer to this speech.

"Oh! my owl will be a better boy than his master. Won't you, my dear little wiseacre? Look, mammy, doesn't he look wise?"

"You'll love him, and take care of him for two days," said Hesther; "and then you'll forget to feed him, and he will starve, and he'll die if I don't see to it."

"No, I shan't."

"Yes, you will. All children forget everything—get tired of everything; and you are a child like the rest—but a child like the rest," she kept repeating, as if to assure herself of a fact which she did not in the least believe, for she thought him a shining angel.

"I don't forget," said the boy, fixing upon her his beautful lustrous eyes—eyes in which heaven itself seemed to dwell. "Don't say I forget, mammy. I don't forget—you are my

mammy, and there's the other mammy. No, I don't forget, and never shall forget *her;* but I called, her mamma."

"Pooh—pooh! What are you dreaming of?"

"Dreams are when we sleep. We waken from dreams — not to forget is — not like sleep. We waken, and it's always there. I remember that mammy, called mamma—yes, that I do, and how she looked, so different from you—beautiful and white—and with her kind face, and sitting upon her knee; and the glove. Ah! naughty Hesther, you haven't shown me the glove since I don't know when."

"Because you are a naughty boy; and you'll steal the glove, and run away from me."

"*I* naughty! *I* steal!" and turning his back upon her, he moved away.

"Don't be naughty now, then. What are you turning your back upon me for? What's the great harm of it after all? Who told you you mustn't steal."

"Why *you* did—you know you did. You said—I heard you—to Jasper only the other day, when he wanted you to let me go and creep through a hedge, and up a tree, and get

the pears. 'No,' you said, 'let the other boys do *that*. My boy was not born to steal.' And now you call me a thief, but I'm not a thief; and I won't, no, nor never will steal. No, not my own—for the glove is my own—but I won't steal it. I'll be dead before I'll steal."

"Well, well, don't go into a passion about it. I don't know you to-day, Charlie!"

"I am growing a bigger boy," was the answer; "and I—Mammy," suddenly interrupting himself, "what *is* Charlie? A Gorgio, a Romanee, or a Caloré? Where did you find Charlie? I heard Jasper and Mrs. Herne talking about me yesterday, as they sat over the fire roasting the eggs they got out of Farmer Robson's poultry-yard. They were talking of me and you."

"And what did they say?"

"They said that you were a fool, or mad, or worse, or bewitched, to make such a to-do about me as you did. If I were the prince of the fairies, they said, it might be something; but I was no fairy, odd as I was, but a mortal woman's child, and *that* you knew, as well as any of them.

"'Why where did she pick him up?' said

old Mrs. Herne, 'for sure and certain he's not one of us; and he's got hair and eyes the colour of heaven's blue and of the sunbeams.' She said too—wasn't that pretty?—'So, if he come from fairy-land it's not I that should wonder, only you say you know he don't.'"

"Well, and what did Jasper say?"

"Jasper said, 'No, no, you needn't ask questions, Mrs. Herne, for it's a story as well kept under the bush. But come from fairy-land, he does not, depend upon that; for his mother was a Christian woman, baptised in a church, though I believe she was about as beautiful as the queen of the fairies herself.'"

The boy paused in his narration, and his childish face took an expression of deep thought—such a look as children are seen at times to assume. At last he lifted up his head, and looking into Hesther's face, who sat there, her eyes rivetted upon him, he said:

"But I think Mrs. Herne's right, and Jasper's wrong; for I do believe that I must have come from fairy-land!"

"And why do you think so?"

"That beautiful lady all in white, with her

pink cheeks, and her beautiful white arms; and that used to hold me on her knee, and give me kisses, so soft, so different from your big kisses, mammy!—and walls! walls;—all round gold and blue and scarlet, like the sky in the evening! That must be fairy-land! Oh, it's over and over, I've heard old Mrs. Herne talk and tell of fairy-land; and it's not the first time, by many, and many, that I thought I must have come from there!"

"And so you did," said Hesther, abruptly, struck by a new and sudden terror, at the distinctness of the child's recollections, which she had hoped were by this time obliterated. As she awakened to a sense of new danger, her resolution was taken, as usual, at once.

"And so you did. Mrs. Herne was quite right! Yes, to be sure; Jasper won't own it, because he's jealous; and he can't bear that my Charlie should be the fairy queen's own fairy prince, and he only a black thief of a gipsy-boy!—but Mrs. Herne's right! Yes; all you remember happened in fairy-land!"

"Shall I ever get back to fairy-land? I want to see that fair lady in white again."

"Oh! I don't know. Who can tell?—who can tell? Yes, when Hesther's dead—yes, when Hesther's dead; but not till Hesther's dead," she added passionately. "No, no, it shan't be till Hesther's dead. She's a black, bad creature is Hesther; and Charlie is a bright angel, fairy prince of light; but he musn't leave Hesther till Hesther's dead! He must shovel Hesther into the grave, and lay the sods over her poor body, with his own dear sweet hand, and then he shall go—then he shall go back—yes, yes, to his fairy-land, and leave these villainous ones here. But if Hesther is accursed—oh Charlie! you must remember who it was for. I see her; she's always there maundering at me, and grinning at me, and nobody knows why. I wish everybody knew why. It wouldn't be so bad if they knew all; but it was for you, child! you, my angel of brightness! all for you! If Hesther's accursed it was all for you."

In this strange, incoherent way she would sometimes burst forth, and the boy would stare at her with wonder, and pity, and love. Yes, these wild outbursts of feeling deeply interested his young heart, and made him love her more

and more, with a strange, mysterious sort of feeling. Everything, indeed, around him was mystery: himself and his recollections the greatest of mysteries; and the dark temper of the being with whom he was so closely connected, and the life he led with her, all was mystery. But greater than these lay everywhere around him, and his young heart was beginning to open to a perception of them. "Where was this beautiful, unseen, but well-remembered, land of the fairy's in which he first drew breath? and why and how, had he fallen from it—fallen so deep and so low? And what world was this in which he now found himself?"

The dark barren mountains among which he chiefly wandered with the tribe to which Hesther belonged, were of Hesther's world: that was plain. There was nothing wonderful or mysterious in them. These wide-extended tracts, where chaos still seemed to reign, said nothing to his heart. The rude forms of matter which surrounded him told no tale of that better sphere of being, on which his attention, having been once turned to the subject, dwelt with such intense desire. Yes, that scene

which surrounded him was in harmony with, and belonged to, Hesther's world.

But was there nothing more? There were sweet and lovely things to be met with now and then, even here, which seemed to whisper to him of that better world, that land of beauty and goodness, that land of fairy, from which they told him he had been driven. And when such objects were presented, he now began to believe that invisible fingers must have been at work upon them; and that those beautiful beings of which he had heard tell, and of whose existence his memory seemed to recal the faint yet ineffaceable trace, had been busy in creating them.

The brook that ran coursing and sparkling down between the frowning rocks, possessed a beauty of this description; for, as he followed its meanderings from the place where Hesther had fixed her abode, he came to what were to him scenes of unimaginable beauty — where the brook ran clear and transparent as crystal, murmuring among shining pebbles; the silver trout were seen gliding, and lovely water-flowers decked the banks; or sometimes the

broken, rocky floor was covered with emerald and golden mosses, whose vivid hues shone through the gilded waters. And the little brook-lime, with its sea-green leaves and tiny blossoms of the brightest blue, the large golden-flowered caltha, which loves the wet places, and giant reeds with brown towering heads, were bordering the stream.

His perception of beauty was so keen that the child found a loveliness inconceivable in everything, and while others passed unheeding by, he was revelling in that exquisite sense of the beautiful which there was scarce an object around him too insignificant to inspire. The very grass that grew in the clefts of the rocks waving its light head to the passing wind, was to him a source of delight. The well-known lines of Wordsworth express to perfection the feelings of such a child :

"Clouds hang around us in our infancy !"

Colours ! forms ! sounds !—every sense was framed for the most exquisite perception of their charms. The deep blue of the harebell, the soft pink of the lychnis—above all, the rich

gold of the yellow broom were his jewels and his treasures!—fairy treasures lavished around him, and treasures none else about him perceived. The rich scent of the hawthorn, or of the meadow sweet with its wagging top; and above all, of the wild hedge-rose, were the perfumes of Arabia to him, the song of the blackbird or the throstle, delicious music; to which, stretched upon a bank covered with daisies, whilst the bee hummed at his work, the child would listen for hours. His eye fixed upon the blue summer sky above his head, endeavouring to penetrate its crystal depths, to seek the great problem of being—of what oppressed him—what he was—whence come? and what portentous meaning lay behind the varied screen of nature which surrounded him?

Let not all this be thought incredible. Such speculations, such questionings, such musings and searchings, are not uncommon in very young children of a reflective turn, especially those who live much in silent communion with nature and themselves. The great mother reveals herself, as it were, to them upon every side, and in her benignity awakens

the soul, and calls into being those nobler thoughts and loftier aspirations, which make of the human animal, a man—say, rather, an angel!

END OF VOL. I.

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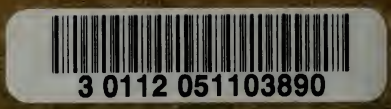
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